

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT TRAINING PROGRAM:
HOPE CONQUERS DISTRESS

By

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Abstract

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The desire to help pastors is heartfelt. Some pastors may not feel confident enough to help couples whose marriages are in distress. Couples sometimes seek help from their pastors and many pastors are placed on the “frontlines” and can be of tremendous help if equipped. However, if the pastor does not seem confident and competent, a couple may leave the meeting not feeling hopeful about their marriage.

The researcher led eighteen pastors through a two-day marriage enrichment training workshop called “Hope Conquers Distress.” The workshop provided pastors with the tools necessary to provide immediate practical steps, implement ongoing solutions, and make necessary referrals to help couples to heal and avoid the many disasters associated with distressed marriages.

Pre- and Post-training surveys were given before and immediately after the training, in order to measure any changes in competency and confidence of the pastors when working with couples that were experiencing distressed marriages. Subsequent surveys were given at one, three, and six months intervals after training. Initial findings show that there were increased levels of both competence and confidence of the pastor.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

The sermon that day was great. The message seemed to hit home for many. After the service, a member requested a brief meeting. The pastor sensed that the request for this impromptu meeting had something to do with “Marriage,” the subject matter of the sermon preached. As the meeting with the pastor and the member progressed, the pastor is astonished and saddened to hear what has been going on in the marriage and quickly recognized that this member’s marriage was in distress, possibly heading for a divorce. The pastor wants to help in every way possible, but does not feel confident and competent enough to effectively help. The members recognized the pastor’s willingness to help, but also recognized a lack of confidence, and left that meeting not feeling hopeful about his or her marriage.

In my encounters with pastors, this is an all too familiar story. The pastor spent time preparing the sermon, and it was delivered through teaching (explaining what Scripture says and means) and preaching (application of how it applies to the hearers’ lives, with inspiration and encouragement to do it). An effective sermon contains both, as some would argue that “good preaching contains teaching.”¹ However, after good teaching and preaching, some couples still need that one-on-one with their pastor to address difficult life challenges, including marital distress. Some couples still need

¹ John R. Bisagno, *Pastor’s Handbook* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2011), 194.

additional practical steps and strategies to apply to their marriage. Some couples still need to know that there is hope. A pastor can be that conduit of hope for hurting couples when he, or she, is trained and equipped.

This demonstration project provided pastors with the tools necessary to explore marriage stressors and inject hope into distressed marriages. The information presented in two workshops was geared to equipping pastors to be more confident and competent when dealing with couples that are in distress.

Research Questions

This project sets out to answer the following questions:

- 1) What kind of counseling is a typical pastor trained to provide and when should a referral be made?
- 2) What lessons can be learned from John 7:53-8:11 about how Jesus dealt with marriage, adultery, forgiveness, conflict resolution and reconciliation?
- 3) Would a training in a new marriage enrichment program called Hope Conquers Distress, increase a pastor's self-reported competency and confidence, and effectively inject hope into a couple whose marriage is in distress?²

Ministry Setting

Jesus Deliverance Mission Int'l Brooklyn (JDMIBklyn) was founded by Apostle Coreen Smith in 2007. The ministry started with Pastor Colleen Kendall and about ten members and this writer. Subsequently, in 2011, this researcher was ordained a pastor to the gospel ministry. The researcher's role in the ministry includes preaching, training in

² This question was changed from, "What is the cultural influence of marriage from Guyana to the United States and what strengths from the culture can be used to help marriages thrive?" The research led me in a different direction.

Christian education through Bible study, counseling, performing weddings, baby dedications, funerals and other special service events. Administrative duties include planning special service events and scheduling preaching assignments. As treasurer, this writer prepares and oversees budget proposals and is responsible for all ministerial expenses. Annual financial updates are given to the Committee board and then members of the church.

JDMIBklyn is located in the East New York Section of Brooklyn, District 5. The estimated population of this district in 2014 was approximately 190,000. This section of Brooklyn consists of predominantly black or of African American descent at 65.7%. Whites are about 15.1%, and other races at 15.5%. The other races include Hispanics or Latinos, Mexicans, Asians and Puerto Ricans.³ JDMIBklyn is committed to serving all in this diverse community as is reflected in the motto “Receiving God’s Promises and Power Gift to Serve All.”⁴ The ministry provides ample care, support and service to its members through the programs and services. The ministry appreciates the diversity of gifts and encourages all members to use their gifts. JDMIBklyn believes that every gift is valuable. Paul writes:

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them (Romans 12:4-6).

The mission of JDMIBklyn is to introduce people to the Lord Jesus Christ, mentor them into a Christ-like relationship with the Father, and help them to discover and use

³ U. S. Census, <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF> (accessed Aug 30, 2016).

⁴ The motto was later introduced in 2010.

their spiritual gifts. The ministry equips the believer for service and sends them out into the world to introduce others to the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

Spiritual growth in all members is desired. The church focuses on teaching the Word, with the understanding that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). To aide in the spiritual development of our members, the ministry sets forth a spiritual goal every week. The spiritual goal is based on the sermon preached that Sunday. As an example, a goal for a sermon on forgiveness would be to forgive someone for that week. Prayer meetings and Bible studies are highly recommended to all members.

JDMIBklyn is a small but growing family church. The seating capacity is 50 and an average of 25-30 worship on any given Sunday. On special services, seating is filled to capacity. The church space is not currently accessible by wheelchair. Accessibility issues are currently being evaluated as the church is exploring ways for it to be more effective in serving the community.

There are about 12 different families that regularly attend JDMIBklyn. The ages range from 1 to 93 years and include nine children, twelve teenagers and nineteen adults. The primary language spoken is English. All bulletins and church information are printed in English. Traditionally, the church is non-denominational with a Pentecostal background. This is seen in our world-view. Some of the essential principles of our faith are stated in the Articles of Church Documents:⁶

⁵ This information is found in the Articles of the Church.

⁶ Article 5 of Church Documents.

1. We believe that the Bible alone is God's Word. The Scriptures are infallible, inerrant, and the sole and final authority for all matters of faith and conduct (2 Timothy 3:16; Cor. 2:13).
2. We believe in the Eternal Godhead who has revealed Himself as One God existing in Three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinguishable but indivisible (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).
3. We believe the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of men, was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-35; John 1:14-18; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).
4. We believe in the salvation of sinners by grace through repentance and faith in the perfect and sufficient work of the cross of Calvary by which we obtain remission of sins (Ephesians 2:8-9; Heb. 9:12; Rom 5:11).
5. We believe in the necessity of water baptism by immersion in the Name of the Eternal Godhead in order to fulfill the command of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:34-36; 19:1-6).
6. We believe the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and that He is an abiding helper, teacher, and guide (John 6:13, 14:16-17 and 16:8-11; Romans 8:26).
7. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit and in the exercise of all biblical gifts of the Spirit according to the instructions given to us in 1 Corinthians 12-14.
8. We believe in eternal life for believers (John 3:16; 5:24), and eternal punishment for unbelievers (Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Rev 20:10-15).

JDMIBklyn started in 2007 with Sunday worship service at 2:00 pm and Bible study on Mondays at 6:30 pm. In 2008, Bible study moved to Thursdays at 7:30 pm and prayer meeting was introduced on Tuesdays at 7:30 pm. In 2009 the Sunday worship service moved to 12:00 pm and Sunday school was introduced at 11:00 am. In 2014, changes were made to the service times: Sunday worship service started at 11:00 am and Sunday school started at 10:00 am. In 2015, the Christmas day service started on Christmas Eve at 10:00 pm. In 2016, Sunday school was renamed Christian education; all changes made to accommodate the members' schedules, were reviewed and approved by the Committee board.

JDMIBklyn seems to resonate more with Avery Dulles' fellowship model.⁷ The order of service at JDMIBklyn includes the following: Opening prayers, Worship, reading of Psalms, Welcome, Announcements, Word, Communion, Offering, and Benediction. The reading of Proverbs and the reading of a verse by a young person was introduced in 2013. Currently, the service includes the reading of the Psalms and Proverbs, and a young person reads a verse from the Scripture. This part of the service I would not allow to be changed.

The Church has its roots in Guyanese traditions. Guyana is on the mainland of South America but is considered to be a part of the Caribbean region because its language, culture and mores are more similar to those of the Caribbean peoples. The Guyanese culture is shown through the type of music and the type of foods served at special events. Both the music and the foods are Caribbean oriented. Music includes

⁷ "Introduction to the Setting: Guide to Writing a Congregational Profile," (New York: New York Theological Seminary, 2016), 5.

reggae and soca beats to many gospel songs. Foods include jerk chicken, curry chicken, cook-up rice, roti and pouri. Many members feel at home in JDMIBklyn. According to Plaza,

The Caribbean is a “home” of the imagination, helping to develop and further define the region itself (Goulbourne and Solomos 2004). Caribbean people are influenced by a polychronic sense of time, space, and relationships (Hall 1976). Those migrants who did leave retained cultural baggage that included Caribbean food preferences, musical tastes, a colorful patios language, superstitions, myths, folklore, and unique living arrangements and family structures.⁸

JDMIBklyn is not racially and ethnically diverse, since most families are related to Caribbean traditions and tend to maintain their “home” identity. As a result, the church has started to implement more contemporary music—like Shackles by Mary Mary—in the worship and has added some variations in the foods, like quiche, which are served at events.

The membership of JDMIBklyn consist of those persons who express their desire for membership, demonstrate a willingness to cooperate with the purpose of the fellowship and meet the following qualifications as stated in the Church’s constitution.

- 1 Personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, water immersion baptism and a desire to obey the requirements set forth in Acts 2:36-47.
- 2 Agreement with the Doctrines of Faith as stated in the Statement of Beliefs.
- 3 A lifestyle that is in consistent with Christian conduct and doctrine.
- 4 Regular attendance at the activities of the Church.
- 5 Financial support of the Church by tithes and freewill offerings.
- 6 Voluntary submission to the spiritual oversight of the Church.
- 7 Application for membership submitted to the Committee.⁹

⁸ Dwaine Plaza, “Roti and Doubles as Comfort Foods for the Trinidadian Diaspora in Canada, the United States, and Britain,” *Social Research* 81, no. 2 (Summer2014 2014): 464. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 31, 2016).

⁹ Church Constitution, Article 6.

The demographics of the ministry vary. The educational background and income levels of our members vary. The mean income in 2014 for the East New York section of Brooklyn was \$45,940.¹⁰ However, 51% of the population have an income that is less than \$34,999.00.¹¹ These percentages are reflected in JDMIBklyn, as many members are unemployed, low income or on fixed income. Income levels at JDMIBklyn top out at middle class. Financial support for the ministry comes through the faithful remitting of tithes and offering by members. Educational background ranges all the way to the graduate level. The ministry has three persons with graduate degrees, including this writer, who earned an M.Div degree in 2013.

JDMIBBrooklyn is guided by the Committee Board. The Board prays for the ministry, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, according to the Word of God (Rom 8:14). The Committee consists of the senior pastor, assistant pastor/treasurer, elder, minister and two deacons. The Board oversees all the following programs: Bible Study, Prayer Meeting, Men's Ministry, Women's Ministry, Dance Ministry, Young People/Youth Ministry, and Christian Education. The Board also ensures proper training for leaders through special teachings, workshops and seminars.

The most important programs in the life of this congregation are Bible Study, Prayer Meeting, Young People/Youth Ministry and Christian Education. The emphasis of the programs is to promote spiritual growth in all members in accordance to Romans 10:17 which states, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

¹⁰ <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Some programs, like Women's and Men's Ministry were introduced, but are not fully functional as yet. The problem is finding the leadership support for these ministries. Even though these programs can be abandoned without affecting the ministry significantly, the church is in the process of revitalizing them and possibly adding a Children's Choir ministry.

The decision-making process of JDMIBklyn rests on the Committee members. All programs are evaluated and then approved by the board.¹² The board values the opinions of all members when evaluating and approving any program. The formal process is by majority vote. Committee meetings are held every three months or as deemed necessary. The financial support for the church comes primarily from those who are on the board. However, this does not influence the decision-making process because there are also those on the board who are unable to contribute much financially.

JDMIBklyn understands that communication is vital for any ministry to succeed. The formal channels of communication come through written sources, social media and oral announcements. Most forms of communication occur during service every Sunday. Official reports pertaining to the ministry are revealed in members' meetings. Members' meetings are held quarterly, beginning in January. This writer does not believe there are any substantial informal channels of communication because members are encouraged to speak up and make suggestions in the members' meetings.

It is the responsibility of the Sr. Pastor and this writer, to see that communication is carried out efficiently and effectively. Therefore, the leadership must always be informed and available to speak about any programs, issues or concerns of the

¹² Committee Members Guidelines, JDMIBklyn, 1.

congregation. Church announcements are given every Sunday or as needed. Facebook, email and text are other ways in which the church communicates with its members.

JDMIBklyn currently involves its members when planning to achieve any goal. Members volunteer their help for special services and events. There are a few faithful members who will take on additional responsibilities if needed. Even though JDMIBklyn is a branch of the church in Guyana, it does not solicit any help or support from the mother church.

One critical issue currently facing the ministry is the lack of space in the building to function efficiently. Therefore, the leadership is in the process of finding a more suitable place for church services. To aide in this process, the church has implemented a special building fund drive. This special fund allows its members to contribute financially towards the future building. The church utilizes its backyard for many special events such as BBQ fundraisers, prayer breakfasts and outdoor services.

As a pastor and teacher of the Word, theological issues and doctrine are very important to JDMIBklyn. Bible study is primarily used for this purpose. Over the past years we have studied the doctrine of God, the doctrine of humanity, Christology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the church.

Marriage is currently the topic of discussion at JDMIBklyn. There are nine married couples in the ministry and two thirds (67%) of the marriages are in distress. Should these couples divorce, this amount would be much higher than the estimated Christian divorce rate of 42%.¹³ Topics of discussion includes, “God’s Design for

¹³ Adelle M. Banks, “Christians Question Divorce Statistics” *Star Tribune*, March 17, 2011: Variety Section. E5. According to the US Census data, there were 6.8 weddings per 1000 people vs. 3.6 divorces per 1000 people.

Marriage,” “Godly Roles of Husbands and Wives,” “Communication and Conflict Resolution,” “Biblical Principles of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage,” “Parenting,” and “Finances in Marriage.”

This researcher has seen significant growth in the members who are committed to Bible study. Members are able to expound on Scripture and to understand biblically what the Bible teaches about controversial topics, such as abortion or same-sex marriage. JDMIBklyn believes these discussions are necessary for spiritual growth. One area that the members will be studying soon is Christian Eschatology, or the doctrine of the end times.

Statement of the Problem

Christian marriages are going through many difficulties and some are on the verge of disintegrating. According to some estimates, the Christian divorce rate is 42%.¹⁴ In the researcher’s ministry context, 67% (6 out of 9 married couples) of marriages are highly distressed. Hope is a critical component in every Christian life, and even more important for couples in distressed marriage. Hopelessness easily steps in when couples are in distress.

Distressed couples sometimes seek out help from their pastors. Many pastors are placed on the “front lines” and can be of tremendous help if equipped. However, many pastors are not trained to help distressed couples. Some distressed couples may feel that there is little hope for their marriage. Pastors, because they are seen as spiritual leaders and reservoirs of hope, can be of help to struggling couples. However, if the pastor does

¹⁴ Ibid.

not seem confident and competent, a couple in distress may leave the meeting not feeling hopeful about their marriage.

As a pastor, this writer has a high sense of urgency concerning this problem. The cultural and personal experiences in marriage, has allowed this writer to recognize that there is a lot at stake in terms of the biblical, theological, historical, social, economic, psychological and spiritual dimensions.

Culturally, marriages in Guyana are similar to that of other Caribbean cultures in that there are three common forms. According to Samuel and Wilson, the three common forms of unions are visiting unions, common law unions and married unions.

Visiting or keeper unions are the most unstable type and are usually characterized by only one partner with no commitments from the man, who merely visits for sexual gratification (Roberts, 1955, Barrow, 1999). The relationship is transitory in nature but may lead to marriage or common-law unions, often resulting in the formation of female-headed households (Manyoni, 1980). Common-law unions tends to be more permanent than visiting unions, although not legally recognized in the post slavery era, it is currently protected by law and usually requires the sharing of a home and resources for the upkeep of the family (Manyoni, 1980).¹⁵

Married unions in Guyana can be examined through two major groups of people: Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese. Most Indo-Guyanese marriages are arranged. Since divorce is frowned upon in the Indian tradition, many couples continue to live together even if their marriage is in distress.¹⁶

¹⁵ Preethy S. Samuel and Leon C. Wilson, "Values and Beliefs of Indo-Guyanese: An Assessment of the Assimilation Hypothesis" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 2008),

¹⁶ Preethy S Samuel and Leon C. Wilson, "Structural Arrangements of Indo-Guyanese Family: An Assessment of the Assimilation Hypothesis," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 40, no. 3 (May 2009): 442. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 3, 2016).

Some studies suggest that Indo-Caribbean women are married early and move into visiting or common-law unions later than Afro-Caribbean women who tend to become involved in visiting unions before they decide to marry.¹⁷ Most low-income Afro-Caribbean families have experienced visiting and common-law unions.¹⁸ It is important for pastors to recognize and understand the cultural context of the couples to better help them through their situations.

Biblically and theologically, God's plan for marriage is at stake. Pastors must be able to help distressed couples understand God's design for marriage. In summary, marriage is a covenant, not just a contract, between a man and a woman (Gen 2:23-24). A covenant is stronger than a contract, in that "the parties to a covenant are obligated to carry out their respective commitments under the penalty of divine retribution should they later attempt to avoid them."¹⁹ For this reason, marriage vows were to be taken seriously (Numbers 30:2). Distressed marriages, if not addressed can lead to divorce.

Secular society today would prefer to see distressed couples divorce rather than work towards restoration. Dockery points out:

The Bible emphasizes that God Himself intends marriage to be a lifelong covenant relationship between one man and one woman..... Both the Lord and Paul appealed consistently to the creation ordinance of marriage for their teaching. The Bible *nowhere* demands or even recommends divorce. Instead, forgiveness and reconciliation are urged (1 Cor 7:11). Any

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Samuel, and Wilson, "Values and Beliefs of Indo-Guyanese: An Assessment of the Assimilation Hypothesis," 242.

¹⁹ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2001), 299.

exceptions are given grudgingly, as a way of regulating sinful conditions. In short, the easy acceptability of modern divorce is foreign to the Bible.²⁰

God's best desire for marriages is to see marriages thrive. The roles of husband and the wife are distorted when the couples are in distress. The Bible teaches that the husband is the head (1 Cor 11:3). Headship is referring to position and not inequality, since God is mentioned in the same verse as the head of Christ.²¹ The husband should obey God and love, honor, and protect his wife as he would his own body (Eph. 5:23, 25, 28-29). The husband must understand what it means to live with his wife in an understanding way (1 Peter 3:7). Husbands and wives must learn what it means to submit to each other (Eph. 5:21). The wife should obey God and also understand what it means to submit to her own husband "as to the Lord" (Eph. 5: 22, 24). Pastors must be able to effectively reinforce roles in distressed relationships. The family, which is an important unit of the community and the society, can then be strengthened.

When marriages are in distress, the viability of the family is threatened. Research has shown that distressed marriages affect the family negatively. Parenting skills becomes poorer. When parenting skills are poorer, children seem to adjust poorly to parents. The negative effects continue as conflicts between siblings escalate and parent-child conflicts increases. Children are affected more negatively from distressed marriages, and studies also show that behavioral problems increase.²² This research

²⁰ David S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 854-55.

²¹ Tony Evans, *Kingdom Marriage: Connecting God's Purpose with Your Pleasure* (Carol Stream IL: Focus on the Family, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 350.

²² Frank D. Fincham and Steven R. H. Beach, "Conflict in Marriage: Implications for Working with Couples," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (Feb 1999): 47.

advances that the negative effects on the family can be reversed when a pastor is able to inject hope into a couple whose marriage is in distress.

Socially, marriages are at stake. One of the most significant trends revealed when studying distressed marriages is how individuals view marriage. Many adults and children now view marriage differently as a result of living in distressed marriage situations or seeing the effects of someone who is in a distressed marriage. Worthington writes that

In the United States, our cultural understanding of marriage, especially among late high school and college students and those approaching the traditional marrying age, has continued to change. Whereas polls show that almost all people hold marriage as a personal goal for themselves, few are willing to argue that marriage is socially beneficial and good for virtually everyone in society.²³

Pastors can impact this negative cultural understanding when they effectively inject hope into distressed marriages and begin to see noticeable differences in the marriages.

Distressed couples' health is also at stake. Since healthy marriages help to promote health and well-being, distressed marriages can increase a person's risk of physical and psychological dysfunction. Studies show that distressed marriages correlate with increased cases of illnesses, e.g. cardiac disease, cancer, and chronic pain.²⁴

Distressed marriages are also linked to depression, eating disorders, increased physical and psychological abuse of partners, alcoholism, including episodic drinking, binge

²³ Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2005), xvii.

²⁴ Karen B. Schmalzing and Tamara G. Sher, "Physical Health and Relationships," in *Clinical Handbook of Marriage and Couples Interventions*, ed. W. Kim Halford and Howard J. Markham, 323-345 (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

drinking, and out-of-home drinking.²⁵ This is quite alarming and must be seriously addressed if the current trend of distressed marriages in the church is to be changed.

Well-equipped pastors can help in this cause.

Spiritually distressed marriages impact the husband, wife and children. Ideally, couples are encouraged to tend to the souls of their marriage through church fellowship, worshipping, praying and studying God's Word together. Parents can then impart biblical wisdom to their children. This seldom happens when couples are in distress. Thus, the children are affected spiritually also.

The ultimate goal for this project is to equip pastors to be more confident and competent when dealing with distressed marriages and make appropriate referrals when needed. The source of hope for the future can come through this marriage enrichment training program, Hope Conquers Distress. This training program will equip pastors to effect change in the couple's relationship. Changing the nature of any relationship requires time, patience and experience in problem resolution and systemic modification.²⁶ Problem resolution refers to the effectiveness of different treatment strategies to target specific problems of the marital relationship. Some treatment strategies are, "facilitating communication, restructuring cognition, expressing affect, modifying behavior, negotiating conflict, fostering trust, clarifying family of origin issues, and other change processes."²⁷ A pastor who is exposed and becomes experienced in some of these techniques can be an asset in helping distressed couples.

²⁵ Fincham and Beach, "Conflict in Marriage," 47.

²⁶ Gerald R. Weeks, *Treating Couples: The Intersystem Model of the Marriage Council of Philadelphia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 103.

²⁷ Ibid.

Equipped pastors can also help change the nature of a distressed couple's relationship through system modification. System modification refers to the effectiveness of the same treatment strategies above but the goal is different. The goal is to "target the fundamental dynamics to the relationship,"²⁸ by modifying the basic functioning of the relational system and by establishing new ways of relating. Systemic change is needed in the counseling process and can yield great results when helping distressed couples. Weeks notes that "The powerful effects of systemic change make it unnecessary for therapy to address each and every problem area. By targeting key relational dynamics, the therapist maximizes the leverage for change in broad areas of the relationship."²⁹ Distressed marriages can benefit tremendously from counseling strategies that produces systemic change. Pastors, who are trained in these areas can make referrals, or can help couples towards the road of recovery.

Couples who are in distress can easily loose hope in their marriage, having no expectation of good or success for their marriage. These couples also sometimes believe that their marriage is not susceptible to cure or is incapable of redemption or improvement. Couples who are in distress can feel hopeless in their marriage. Couples can feel as though they have tried everything, and the harder each tried, the worst things got. If this problem is not addressed, family disasters will continue to escalate. Pastors can help to reverse this negative trend.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Pastors and the Need to Inject Hope

As Christians, it is important to understand that “Hope Conquers Distress.”

Pastors must understand this, and help inject hope into couples who are in distressed marriages and possibly open the door for reconciliation. Many pastors are placed on the “front lines” when couples are seeking help. Pastors need to be confident in knowing what to do when couples want to call it quits, when there are communication issues, forgiveness issues, when there are clear signs of spousal abuse, or when a referral for medical or psychological help should be made. Confident levels increase as the pastor becomes more effective in helping couples whose marriages are in distress.

Added to this, pastors must also understand what the Bible teaches about marriage, conflict resolution and reconciliation. “Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program” will teach pastors in these areas and train them on how to inject hope and help couples see that reconciliation is possible in their distressed marriages.

Importance of the Project

This project is important to the researcher because the researcher is very passionate about helping pastors to be equipped in helping distressed couples. The writer expects pastors to become confident in helping distressed couples explore why they are in distress, and to help couples make the necessary steps to come out of their hurtful situations. This writer’s desire is to train pastors on how to inject hope into distressed marriages after analyzing the root causes of the couple’s issues. Some of the most basic causes for distress in marriages are spiritual issues, communication issues, financial issues, sexuality issues, immoral sexual issues, abuse issues, health issues, and personality issues. This researcher expects pastors to be capable enough to help couples

realize the negative effects of marital distress on the family. The couple will then be allowed to make a commitment to a series of counseling sessions that will offer ongoing solutions, hope and reconciliation.

This project will help the local church body, because a well-equipped pastor will be more confident and competent when dealing with couples whose marriage may be in distress. The pastor can help couples to heal and avoid the many disasters associated with distressed marriages. The possibility of decreasing the amount of Christian divorces greatly exists. More importantly, this is not just about reducing the divorce rate of Christians, but increasing their marital satisfaction.

Purpose and Model of Research

The Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program was intended to train and equip pastors to be conduits of hope to couples whose marriage is in distress. Participants who were trained in the two workshops experienced increased levels of confidence and competence to help couples.

This project measured the participant's self-reported changes in competency and confidence as a result of participation in the two training workshops. The primary source of quantitative data was the participant's responses to the pre- and post-training questionnaires.

The researcher's main responsibility was planning, executing and evaluating the two training workshops on April 1st, 2017 and April 8th, 2017. The pre- and post-training questionnaires were also evaluated by the researcher. Additional help and support came from the site-team members.

Delimitations

Over seventy-five personal invitations were sent out. Although twenty-five responded to the invitations and attended the awareness seminar, the research was limited to eighteen participants who agreed to participate and attended the two-day workshop.

All participants indicated that they were Christians and either pastors, ministers, or leaders in a counseling ministry. However, the participants were from different denominations.

The project focuses only on the participants' self-reported pre-training questionnaire responses, initial post training questionnaires, and responses in a one, three and six- months follow-up assessment of self-reported perceived changes in their competency and confidence when working with distressed marriages.

The literature review and theological section are limited to issues in heterosexual marriage.

Assumptions

Hope Conquer Distress Marriage Enrichment Program is designed to train pastors to help married couples who are in distress. The first assumption is that a Christian marriage is a relationship between a male and a female (Gen 2:23-24).

The second assumption is that a Christian pastor should believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God in accordance to 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

The third assumption is that the Christian pastor should strongly believe that marriage is a covenant, and not just a contract. Marriage vows must be taken seriously in accordance to Numbers 30:2, "If a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath of

binding obligation on himself, he must not break his word, but must do whatever he has promised” (Numbers 30:2 NET).

The fourth assumption is that in some cases of severely distressed marriages, divorce may be necessary and biblically permitted. However, that should not hinder the pastor’s ability to inject hope.

Potential Benefit

The potential benefits for each participant were an increase in knowledge, skills, and confidence, when dealing with couples whose marriages are in distress.

CHAPTER 2 BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MARRIAGE

Exegesis of John 7:53-8:11

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he was healing the sick, casting out devils and teaching wherever he went. One of the subjects Jesus addressed was marriage. Jesus spoke on various topics related to marriage. Some of which includes adultery, divorce, forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Many times, the scribe and Pharisees went out to discredit Jesus, accusing him of not being the Son of God. One tactic used was to see if they could catch him saying or doing something contrary to the Mosaic Law. In the gospel according to Mark we read, "The people watched Jesus closely to see whether he would heal him [a sick man] on the Sabbath, intending to accuse him of doing something wrong" (Mark 3:2). A few chapters further, they asked, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (Mark 12:14). According to the gospel of Matthew, on the topic of marriage they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" (Matt 19:3). This was done even though Jesus clearly stated that he did not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). The trend in their attempt to discredit Jesus continues in the gospel of John, as Jesus had an encounter with a woman accused of being caught in adultery. An exegetically look at John 7:53-8:11 will show how Jesus dealt with the law, marriage, forgiveness, conflict resolution and reconciliation.

The Historical Context of the Book of John

The Romans ruled at this time (AD. 70-85), but the Sanhedrin was the supreme Jewish council. The Sanhedrin was the body (supreme Jewish council) which governed the Jews after the monarchy had been destroyed.³⁰ The membership of the Sanhedrin was drawn primarily from the priestly nobility; the Sadducees were in the majority, or most influential. The Sadducees did accept the Law as having higher authority than the Prophets and the Writings, but they did not believe in a bodily resurrection and denied the existence of spirits and angels (Mark 12:18-27). The Pharisees later became popular at the time of John's writings.³¹ They accepted the directives of the oral and written law, but gave stronger attention to a rigid observance of the oral and written law. This strict adherence to the law will be important in the story with the adulterous woman.

The Cultural Context of the Book of John

Moloney and Harrington point out that the fourth Gospel was written in a place where Judaism, early Christianity, the complex religions of the Hellenistic and Greek world, and incipient Gnosticism rubbed shoulders. The Gospel of John is Greek and Jewish, as is its language, background, and theological point of view. It looks back to the foundational story of Jesus of Nazareth, but tells it in a way that addressed the religious and cultural tumult of Asia Minor at the end of the first century.³²

Marriage celebrations around that time were of Jewish traditions and lasted about a week. The author of the Gospel of John records Jesus performing His first miracle at a

³⁰ J. Julius Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 93.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

³² Francis J. Moloney and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 5-6.

wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). Jesus' presence at the wedding could be viewed as significant because it approved what God ordained.

The Occasion of the Book of John

The author of the Gospel of John is anonymous. Carson and Moo note, "As far as we can prove, the title 'According to John' was attached to it as soon as the four canonical gospels began to circulate together as 'the fourfold gospel.'"³³ The key issue concerning authorship centers on the identification of the "beloved disciple" in the Gospel. Scholars recognize that "John" is a reference to John the apostle, the son of Zebedee (Luke 5:10).³⁴

Dates for the fourth Gospel have varied from before A.D 70 to the final quarter of the second century. John 21:23 suggests it was probably written nearer the end of that period than the beginning. Carson and Moo place the book between A.D. 80 and 85.³⁵

Some suggest that the fourth Gospel was written in Alexandria, while some suggest Antioch. Still others suggest Palestine, because of its close familiarity with cultural details associated to the region. The traditional view is that the fourth Gospel was written in Ephesus.³⁶

³³ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 229.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 264-267.

³⁶ Ibid., 254.

The Purpose of the Book of John

John's purpose statement is found in 20:31: "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Therefore, the purpose can be summed up as evangelistic.

Textual Background of John 7:53-8:1

Most modern textual critics assert that John 7:53-8:11, traditionally known as *pericope adulterae*,³⁷ was not a part of what the apostle John originally wrote. These verses are absent from most of the early Greek manuscripts, and the early Church Fathers do not refer to this narrative in their commentaries.³⁸ Many of the later Greek manuscripts that included it mark it with a special sign or symbol, like an asterisk, to show it was not original. John 7:53-8:1 is found in several different locations in different later manuscripts: after John 7:36, after John 7:44, and after John 7:25. In Luke, it is found after 21:38 and after 24:53. It is, however, absent from the ancient translations like the old Latin, the old Syriac or the early copies of the Peshitta (later Syriac).³⁹

Even though a number of highly respected scholars do not believe this text is a part of the New Testament text, many agree that the story is true to the character of Jesus. Calvin notes the following:

It is plain enough that this passage was unknown anciently to the Greek Churches; and some conjecture that it has been brought from some other place and inserted here. But as it has always been received by the Latin Churches, and is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and contains

³⁷ NET Bible, "First Edition Notes," Jn 7:53, n139, <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/John+7:47>.

³⁸ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 163.

³⁹ Bob Utley, "John 8," The Study Bible Commentary Series, New Testament, <http://bible.org/seriespage/john-8> (accessed June 28, 2017).

nothing unworthy of an Apostolic Spirit, there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage.⁴⁰

John 7:53-8:11 can therefore be used to glean some important principles about marriage.

Jesus' teachings here are consistent with His other teachings throughout the Scriptures.

The Context of John 7:53-8:11

The background events surrounding the story recorded in John 7:53-8:11 are very important. The Apostle John introduces Jesus as the eternal, Incarnate Word of God, the One who existed from eternity past (1:1-18). Jesus chooses his disciples towards the end of this chapter.

Jesus, at a wedding celebration, turns the ceremonial cleansing water into wine (2:1-11) before He proceeds up to the temple in Jerusalem and casts out those who are abusing it, by making God's house of worship an ordinary place of secular business (2:12-17). In chapter 3, Jesus has a private dialogue with Nicodemus, who is surprised to hear that "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (3:3). Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, has no idea what this means.

In chapter 4, Jesus and His disciples go through Samaria where Jesus has a dialogue with the Samaritan woman. It is clear that the Jews never liked Samaritans from the woman's response of, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" (for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans)" (4:9). The Samaritan woman and many other Samaritans come to faith in Jesus Christ. The Samaritan woman brought to Jesus here is the same kind of woman we find in the rest of the text.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 7: *The Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors), 734.

In chapter 5, the Jews sought the more to kill Jesus because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal to God (5:18). Tensions increase in the following chapter after Jesus speaks of Himself as “The Bread of Life” (6:35).

The division between the people widens as Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. In the middle of the feast, Jesus presents Himself at the temple where He begins to teach publicly (7:14). Many at this time come to believe that Jesus must be the Christ (7:41), or at least the Prophet (7:41), whose coming was foretold by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). It is from this backdrop that the text of John 7:53-8:11 will now be analyzed.

Analysis of John 7:53-8:11

The analysis of the text will take place by dividing this passage into four sections. These sections have been established based on what appears to be four basic ideas the text is seeking to convey. The four sections are as follows: The trap 7:53-8:6a, Silenced 8:6b, Response to accusers 8:7-9, Response to accused 8:10-11.

The Trap (7:53-8:6a)

And every man went to his own house. Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came to him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the middle, they said to him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what say you? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.⁴¹

⁴¹ All quotations of Scripture in the analysis section have been taken from the AKJV unless otherwise noted.

The conjunction “and” suggest a continuation from what happened in the preceding verse. The members of the Sanhedrin, including Nicodemus have gone home. The colleagues of Nicodemus were frustrated and too hostile to listen to mere reason.⁴² When the council members go to their own homes, Jesus and His disciples go to the Mount of Olives. Early the next morning, while teaching in the temple, the scribes and Pharisees interrupt Jesus. Carson notes,

The scribes were the recognized students and expositors of the law of Moses, but so central was the law in the life and thought of the first-century Palestinian Jews that the scribes came to assume something of the roles of lawyer, ethicist, theologian, catechist and jurist. Most of them, but certainly not all, were Pharisees by conviction.”⁴³

The Pharisees, being wise in their own sight, still recognized Jesus as a teacher and call him “Master.” The word “Master,” translated as “Teacher,” means that the scribes and Pharisees approached Jesus with nominal respect. Carson notes,

If anyone has learned the Scripture and the Mishnah [a large corpus of Jew is tradition] but not served as a student of the Learned he is one of the people of the land. If he has learned the Scripture but not the Mishnah he is an uneducated man; if he has learned neither the Scripture nor the Mishnah ... [he is indistinguishable from an animal].⁴⁴

Even though the religious authorities showed nominal respect, they will try to outwit Jesus intellectually by making use of their greatest strength, their mastery of the Law of Moses.

The scribes and Pharisees claim that they caught this woman “in the very act of adultery” (8:4). The word, adultery, in the Old Testament means voluntary cohabitation

⁴² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1991), 332.

⁴³ Ibid., 334.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 332.

of a married woman with a man other than her lawful spouse or vice versa. In the New Testament, the sin of adultery is denoted by the word *pornoi*, translated as fornication in 1 Cor 5:1 (voluntary cohabitation between two unmarried persons). However, to distinguish unmarried from married, the words *pornoi* (fornicators) and *moichoi* (adulterers: 1 Cor 6:9) are used. Kreitzer notes that:

The designation of the crime ‘adultery’ raises a number of issues for a narrative reading. Much of the discussion among historical critics has centered on the nature of the crime, the legality of the accusation in terms of proper witness and marital status of the woman.⁴⁵

However, these questions all leads back to the institution of marriage and what the law stated about marriage.

The next verse is an attempt to see Jesus’ view of the law even though the authorities were not interested in the merits of this case, but were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. Carson notes the following:

If Jesus disavowed the law of Moses, his credibility would be instantly undermined: he could be dismissed as a lawless person and perhaps be charged in the courts with serious offences. If he upheld the law of Moses, he would not only be supporting a position that was largely unpopular but one that was probably not carried out in public life, and, worse, which would have been hard to square with his well-known compassion for the broken and disreputable, his quickness to forgive and restore, and his announcement of the life-transforming power bound up with the new birth.⁴⁶

The scribes and Pharisees set Jesus against Moses, thinking that in so doing Jesus would be trapped, that He could do nothing other than condemn Himself by opposing the teaching of the law and of Moses.

⁴⁵ Larry Joseph Kreitzer and Deborah W. Rooke, *Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7.53-8.11)* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 59.

⁴⁶ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 335.

This was not the first time the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus in issues concerning marriage and the law. In Matthew, “The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (Matt 19:3). Then later in the same chapter, the Pharisees asked Jesus, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” (Matt 19:7). The Pharisees’ intentions may be that of a trap, but Jesus’ response was always consistent with what God intended for the institution of marriage from the beginning. Matthew 19:3-9 sums up Jesus’ typical response to questions attacking the institution of marriage.

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, “whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:3-9 NKJV)

Scott points out three important things to notice from Jesus’ response. First, “the Pharisees were preoccupied with the grounds of divorce; Jesus with the institution of marriage.” Second, “the Pharisees called Moses’ provision for divorce a command; Jesus called it a concession to the hardness of human hearts.” Lastly, “the Pharisees regarded divorce lightly; Jesus took it so seriously that, with only one exception, he called all remarriage after divorce adultery.”⁴⁷ With this backdrop, the response that Jesus gives

⁴⁷ John R W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture* (Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 94-95.

will not contradict God's plan for the institution of marriage. Therefore, the silence, will allow Jesus to transition to His brilliant response.

Silenced (8:6b)

But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

What did Jesus write and what was the meaning of his silenced? Some interpretations suggest that Jesus wrote part of Jeremiah 17:13: "Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water." Others, such as T. W. Manson, suggest that Jesus was imitating the practice of Roman magistrates who first wrote the sentence and then read it.⁴⁸ Either way, the scribes and Pharisees misinterpret His silence. Deffinbaugh points out that the Lord's silence is intended to shame His adversaries,⁴⁹ agreeing with Calvin.

For Christ rather intended, by doing nothing, to show how unworthy they were of being heard; just as if any person, while another was speaking to him, were to draw lines on the wall, or to turn his back, or to show, by any other sign, that he was not attending to what was said.⁵⁰

Did Jesus' silence shame His enemies? It does not seem so and therefore gives the scribes and Pharisees the impression that Jesus cannot answer them. This impression quickly changes as Jesus prepares to respond, first to his accusers, and then to the accused.

⁴⁸ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 335.

⁴⁹ Bob Deffinbaugh, <http://bible.org/seriespage/savior-and-sinner-john-753-811> (accessed June 18, 2016).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Response to accusers (8:7-9)

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said to them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the oldest, even to the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the middle.

The scribes and Pharisees continued their outbursts demanding that Jesus give them an answer.⁵¹ Jesus must respond, and does respond with much wisdom. Jesus said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (8:7).

Deffinbaugh points out a few things about Jesus’ response: First, our Lord does not deny this woman’s guilt. As an adulteress, she is condemned by the law, and she does deserve to die. Jesus in no way seeks to set aside the law or to diminish its role in this situation. Jesus’ response is a response from the Law:

Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness. The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 17:6-7).⁵²

According to Jewish custom, the eldest should have begun the stoning. Here the elders were the first to depart. All his accusers gave up their challenge of Jesus, and, in effect, the case against the woman was dismissed.⁵³ The law was more demanding than they estimated. It says too much. It not only condemns this woman; it condemns them all. In addition, Jesus’s words to his opponents also avoid the legal question. He does not

⁵¹ A point about the law must be noted here before understanding Jesus’ response in perspective. Moses said, “If a man commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10). Ironically, the scribes and Pharisee did not bring the adulterer.

⁵² Deffinbaugh.

⁵³ Dinne Bergant, “Sin No More!” *America* 190, no. 10 (March 22, 2004): 31.

explicitly advocate mercy, but rather that those who punish should themselves be righteous.⁵⁴ It is in the response that follows that Jesus is able to demonstrate that he “came to fulfill and not abolish the law” (Matt 5:18).

Response to the Accused (8:10-11)

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said to her, “Woman, where are those your accusers? Has no man condemned you?” She said, “No man, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you: go, and sin no more.”

After everyone leaves, Jesus responds to the woman for the first time. Jesus already knows about her guilt so he asked her “where are those your accusers?” who a short while before seemed so eager to condemn her. Since there are no witnesses, there can be no condemnation, no execution. The scribes call for an execution and no one stays, for no one is willing to cast the first stone.

Pastoral Application

Pastors can learn many things from this passage. There are parallels between the story of the woman in crisis and couples in distressed marriages. Jesus parallels a pastor faced with someone, in this case a wife, going through serious marital difficulties. The scribes and Pharisees parallel the role of a husband who is infuriated, hardhearted, and wanting nothing to do with his wife (divorce). Jesus models a pastor who is able to recognize distress and inject hope into the situation.

As a pastor, injecting hope requires an understanding of how to deal with sin in the lives of those seeking help. Paul reminds us “if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself,

⁵⁴ George Aichele, “Reading Jesus Writing,” *Biblical Interpretation* 12, no 4 (2004): 356.

lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Jesus demonstrated this with the woman when he stooped down, taking his eyes off the presumably half-naked woman whom the Scribes and Pharisees brought to open shame.

It is also important to note that a married couple may be in distress when no one in the marriage may be committing sin. Financial issues due to the loss of a job is one example of this. Regardless of the causes, Hope Conquers Distress is intended to train pastors in ways to inject hope and possibly open the door for reconciliation.

Injecting hope also requires a pastor to recognize how to deal with couples who may have different desires of their marriage. In these cases, it is called “mixed agenda couples (one “leaning out” of the relationship and reluctant to work on the relationship in therapy, and the other “leaning in,” wanting to preserve the relationship and begin therapy).”⁵⁵ Jesus models that a pastor when faced with high conflict marriages should not rush to judgement but take the time to listen, process the situation, and respond with godly wisdom. The opportunity for hope and reconciliation can still be possible, as it was for the woman who met Jesus.

Jesus is also teaching that before reconciliation, forgiveness must be extended and received. Jesus demonstrated this when He said, “Go, and sin no more.” Since God has forgiven all so all can be reconciled to Him (2 Cor 5:18), husband and wife must forgive for reconciliation to take place. Epperly points out, “No person in a conflict situation is excluded from the possibility of reconciliation or from being an instrument of the

⁵⁵ William J. Doherty, Steven M. Harris, and Jason L. Wilde, “Discernment Counseling for ‘Mixed-Agenda’ Couples,” *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy* 42, no. 2 (April 2016): 246.

divine.”⁵⁶ Pastors must help couples to understand that at any given moment Jesus can radically change one’s heart and life, even in the most difficult conflict situations.

The final application is for pastors to understand that all parties involved are sinners and are in need of a Savior. The story not only showed that the woman was a sinner, but so also were all who were around. It is also interesting to point out that sometimes the most religious people are desperately wicked in their motives. Jesus’ simple response of “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (8:7) uncovered their true motives. A pastor must attempt to uncover the true motives of couples seeking help. Following these principles from Jesus can help transform any pastor into the role of a pastoral counselor, a role that requires equipping. As many pastors are not trained in this area, Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program is designed to help.

⁵⁶ Bruce G. Epperly, “The God of Conflict and Reconciliation: Toward a Theology of Conflict Resolution,” *Impact* 20 (1988): 22-23.

CHAPTER 3

THE “HOPE CONQUERS” PASTORAL MARRIAGE COUNSELOR

Entering into the realms of pastoral counseling with couples that are in distressed marriages can be daunting for some pastors. Many of the research participants indicated that not having a clear plan of where to start and where to go with these couples, and having no specialized training for counseling distress marriages makes it difficult to counsel these couples.⁵⁷ Since counseling is a shared discipline with other professions, such as with the psychiatrist, the social worker, and the counseling psychologist, a basic understanding of some marital counseling theories can help increase the pastor’s ability to affect change. However, the Christian pastor must let the couples understand that “true change occurs as a natural process of the sanctifying work of the Spirit.”⁵⁸ The following marital counseling theories will be briefly discussed: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance Commitment Therapy, Collaborative Couples Therapy, Emotionally Focused, Attachment Theory, Conflict Resolution, and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.

Marital Counseling Theories

Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has to do with as person’s thinking and behavior. Shelton explains that CBT

⁵⁷ Pre-training questionnaire, Appendix E.

⁵⁸ Charles Kollar, *Solution Focused Pastoral Counseling an Effective Short Term Approach for Getting People Back On Track* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 44.

is an evidenced based psychological approach practiced by a range of professionals, for the treatment of mental health and other personal and family problems. It seeks to help clients to analyze existing patterns of thinking, emotional reactions and behaviors.⁵⁹

This theory can be helpful when couples exhibit high levels of negative or obscured thinking in their marriage. Cognition will be addressed in more details later in the marriage enrichment section.

Acceptance Commitment Therapy

This next theory pivots from CBT. According to Potts,

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an empirically based behavioral cognitive therapy that uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies together with commitment and behavior change strategies, to increase the ability to act in accordance with personal values in the presence of life adversities⁶⁰

The counselor examines the client's interactions with their environments. It helps them to develop greater clarity about personal values and commit to specific behavioral change. The idea conveyed is that a person can learn to accept what is out of one's control and commit to action without first changing feelings.

Collaborative Couples Therapy

The opportunity for the pastor to meet with both husband and wife exist at the initial stage or during the counseling sessions. Collaborative Couples Therapy (CCT), developed by Daniel B. Wile, Ph.D., was designed to explore the hostile cycles of the relationship. This approach

focuses on the intrinsic difficulty of being in a relationship: the inevitability of repeatedly slipping into withdrawn and adversarial cycles.

⁵⁹ Brian Sheldon, *Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy: Research and Practice in Health and Social Care*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 3.

⁶⁰ Wendy T. M. Potts, "How and for Whom Does Web-Based Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Work? Mediation and Moderation Analyses of Web-Based ACT for Depressive Symptoms," *BMC Psychiatry* 16 (May 23, 2016): 2.

How partners cope with these cycles determines the quality of life in the relationship and, indeed, whether the relationship lasts.⁶¹

Couples who are in distress can benefit from this intervention when the pastor is able to show the couple how to shift out of their withdrawn or adversarial cycle and into a collaborative one.

Emotionally Focused Therapy

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), developed by Susan Johnson and Les Greenberg, focuses on the use of emotions as an agent of change and an attachment orientation to adult love relationships.⁶² Studies suggest that EFT also focuses on the creation of a secure connection that fosters resilience in couples who have experienced trauma. One such study dealt with distressed couples in which the female partner had a severe history of childhood abuse. The results showed that there was a significant reduction in relationship distress at the end of the treatment.⁶³ The high occurrence of childhood abuse among women has negative implications associated with marital distress.

The goal of EFT is to develop a secure bond between distressed couples so that change can begin. Ruzgyte and Spinks explain that

Change happens when the family can restructure their interactions so that affiliation and autonomy are both accepted and nurtured in a relationship. Change occurs in the therapy relationship when the therapist or counselor is first able to create a safe environment for each member to acknowledge

⁶¹ Daniel B. Wile, *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002), 281-307.

⁶² Jay L. Lebow, Anthony L. Chambers, Andrew Christensen, and Susan M. Johnson, "Research on the Treatment of Couple Distress," *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy* 38, no. 1 (2012): 152.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 153.

and explore his or her primary emotions and find acceptance and understanding.⁶⁴

Pastors must be able to explore the childhood history of couples to see if there are traumatic emotional events that are negatively affecting the marriage. A basic understand of this theory can be helpful.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory (AT), researched and developed by John Bowlby, deals with attachments and bonds. AT was initially developed with infants and children in mind, but further research evidence showed that disruptions in attachment in childhood can potentially produce problems in adult relationships, including marriage. In children, a secure attachment is said to be formed when a child has confident expectations of the attachment figure as available and responsive when needed. In adults, a bond and attachment are formed when two persons fall in love. Cassidy and Shaver point out that “marital distress is presumed to be motivated by fears about a partner’s availability and responsiveness.”⁶⁵ Attachment-based marital counselors must uncover “attachment injuries” to help couples heal. Johnson notes that one way to do this is by incorporating emotion-focused techniques to help couples access attachment fears and vulnerabilities that are hidden behind angry and defensive interaction sequences. This approach has produced increased levels of marital satisfaction in the majority of couples completing

⁶⁴ Linda Metcalf, ed., *Marriage and Family Therapy: A Practice-Oriented Approach* (New York: Springer, 2011), 345.

⁶⁵ Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, eds., *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2016), 36.

treatment.⁶⁶ Conflicts that arise from exploring “attachment injuries,” must then be addressed.

Conflict Resolution Therapy

Some form of Conflict Resolution (CR) therapy is required when dealing with couples who are in distress. Susan Heitler, who developed this concept, points out that conflict does not only mean hostility or fighting but can also be silent and unexpressed. Therefore, conflict can be defined as “a situation in which seemingly incompatible elements exert force in opposing or divergent directions.”⁶⁷ Regardless of the causes of the conflicts, some form of resolution is required.

Resolution, according to Heitler, is “the attainment of a solution that satisfies the requirement of all of the seemingly conflicting forces and thereby produces a feeling of closure for all participants.”⁶⁸ Some couples understand the need for resolution in their marriage, but are unable to effectively do so. According to Heitler, effectively resolved conflicts have the following characteristics:

- The process is based on talking, not on verbal or physical violence.
- The process is predominantly cooperative, not avoidant, competitive, antagonistic or coercive.
- The outcome is a settlement that all participants find acceptable and that addresses the concerns of all participants.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Susan M. Heitler, *From Conflict to Resolution: Skills and Strategies for Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy* (New York: Norton, 1993), 5.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 6.

Pastors can greatly benefit from a basic understanding of this theory as they help couples look for solutions. Solution-Focused Therapy was developed with this in mind.

Solution Focus Brief Therapy

Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, focuses on what is working rather than what is broken. It is solution orientated rather than problem orientated. Clients have resources and strengths to resolve complaints. The basic guidelines in this theory are as follows: “If it’s not broken, don’t fix it; once you know what works, do more of it; and if it doesn’t work, don’t do it again- do something different.”⁷⁰

Many of the theories listed above were incorporated into different marriage enrichment programs. Marriage enrichment programs were developed to help couples who are in distress and to enrich marital satisfaction among normal couples. Four empirically supported marriage enrichment programs will now be discussed.

Empirically Supported Marriage Enrichment Programs

In order for a program to be considered empirically supported, the program must meet the set standards created by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the empirically supported treatment (EST) movement. The program has to be effective in two randomized controlled trials by two independent groups of researchers. The program must also have a treatment manual in order to be replicated, and studies have to be published in a peer-reviewed format.⁷¹ Only programs that pass this test are classified as efficacious. After rigorous studies, the following four marriage enrichment programs

⁷⁰ Koller, Kindle Location, 1455.

⁷¹ Dianne L. Chambless and Steven D. Hollon, “Defining Empirically Supported Therapies,” *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology* 66, no. 1 (Feb, 1998): 8.

were designated as efficacious: Prevention and Relationship Program (PREP), Relationship Enhancement (RE), Couple Communication Program (CCP), and Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment (SHFE).⁷²

Prevention and Relationship Program (PREP)

The Prevention and Relationship Program (PREP) was designed by Markman, Stanley, and Floyd to teach marital couples the skills needed for marital success. It was designed to help prevent marital distress and divorce.⁷³ The four main goals are to teach couples better communication and conflict management strategies, to promote understanding of and choices reflecting commitment, to aid couples in clarifying and evaluating expectations, and to enhance the positive bonding in the relationship.⁷⁴

The program is currently available in two formats. The extended weekly format meets for six weeks in two and half hour sessions, with groups of four to eight couples. Brief lectures are given on communication skills and relational issues and each couple is assigned a communication consultant. The consultant helps the couples apply the skills and give active feedback as needed. The second format is compacted into a weekend (usually at a hotel) of twelve sessions with twenty to forty couples. Couples practice the skills on their own.⁷⁵

⁷² Scott F. Jakubowski, "A Review of Empirically Supported Marital Enrichment Programs," *Family Relations* 53, no. 5 (Oct. 2004): 529-531.

⁷³ Mari Jo Renick, "The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP): An Empirically Based Preventive Intervention Program for Couples," *Family Relations* 41, no. 2 (April 1992): 141.

⁷⁴ Jakubowski, "A Review of Empirically Supported Marital Enrichment Programs," 529.

⁷⁵ Renick, 142.

Major research findings show that PREP is effective. In one longitudinal study (10 years) conducted by Markman and other researcher, 85 of 135 participants recruited were randomly given the opportunity to participate in PREP. Of the 85, 33 (39%) completed, 43 (50%) declined, and 9 (11%) partially completed. Couples who declined or partially completed the program remained in the longitudinal study. Fifty of those couples served as controls.⁷⁶ A summary of findings is below in the Table 1:⁷⁷

Table 1: Summary of PREP Research Findings.

Assessment Point	Major Findings
Post intervention	PREP couples show greater use of communication skills than control couples.
1 1/2-year follow-up	PREP couples report greater relationship satisfaction, more positive impact of communication, and fewer relationship problems.
3-year follow-up	PREP couples report greater relationship satisfaction, less problem intensity, and fewer sexual difficulties than control couples.
4-year follow-up	PREP husbands report greater relationship satisfaction than control husband. During interaction with wives, PREP husbands show less dominance, conflict, and overall negative communication than do control husbands.
5-year follow-up	PREP husbands report greater relationship satisfaction than control husbands. During interaction with their wives, PREP husbands show less denial and negative escalation, and greater use of problem-solving behaviors than control husbands. Nineteen percent of control couples had divorce or separated while only 8% of PREP couples had done so.
Across 3-,4-, & 5-year follow up	PREP couples report fewer instances of physical violence with their spouse than do control couples.

The PREP program in the weekend version (PREP-WK) was also extensively studied and showed favorable results. There were sixty-five premarital couples in this

⁷⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

study who were going to be married in the upcoming months. The goal was the same as the regular PREP program. Burnett explains further what was done with PREP-WK:

Burnett (1993) modified the program under investigation in the current study by consolidating the 6-week PREP program into a weekend format so that busy, sometimes geographically separated couples would be able to attend. Burnett demonstrated that PREP-WK couples learned communication skills at least as well as the original PREP couples. Schilling (1999) showed that PREP-WK was as effective in preventing deterioration of average marital satisfaction during the first 3 years of marriage as the original (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988) and German (Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998) PREP programs.⁷⁸

Most studies, both short term and long-term, conclude that PREP and PREP-WK has demonstrated to be beneficial to couples. However, at the time of the study, the effectiveness of PREP for high-risk couples was mixed.

Relationship Enhanced (RE)

Relationship Enhanced (RE), developed by Bernard Guerney, is a marital and family therapy with a psychoeducation approach that emphasizes skill building rather than symptom reduction.⁷⁹ The goal of RE is to strengthen intimate relationships while maintaining the quality of those relationships over time. The program focuses on teaching self-disclosure skills that deals with feelings, behaviors, and the elimination of statements that blame other for relationship issues. Listening skills are also incorporated into the program to aide in the understanding and acceptance of the self-discloser's statements⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Elizabeth A. Schilling, "Altering the Course of Marriage: The Effect of PREP Communication Skills Acquisition on Couples' Risk of Becoming Maritally Distressed," *Journal of Family Psychology* 17, no. 1 (March 2003): 42.

⁷⁹ Jakubowski, "A Review of Empirically Supported Marital Enrichment Programs," 529-530.

⁸⁰ Carl A. Ridley and Ingrid E. Sladeczek, "Premarital Relationship Enhancement: Its Effects on Needs to Relate to Others," *Family Relations* 41, no. 2 (April 1992): 148.

RE training is done through the teaching of nine structured skills: empathic, expressive, discussion/negotiation, problem/conflict resolution, facilitation (partner coaching), self-change, other change, transfer generalization, and maintenance.⁸¹

The program is offered in many different formats. The formats range from all-day marathon sessions to three-day workshop, or the more common format of group meetings, 2 hours weekly for 10-15 weeks. The RE program also has the option for certification for those with a master's degree or those who are enrolled in a graduate program with psychology.⁸²

RE has been extensively researched. One study shows that RE participants demonstrated improved marital communication and satisfaction, relationship adjustment, warmth, empathy, genuineness, and trust.⁸³ A meta-analysis conducted on several enrichment programs showed RE to have the largest effect of all programs reviewed.⁸⁴ These studies clearly show that RE is an efficacious program for marital enhancement.

Couple Communication Program (CCP)

Couple Communication Program (CCP) was developed in 1968 and revised in 1990 by Sherod Miller, Daniel Wackman, and Elam Nunnally. The goal of CCP is to increase awareness of the self and partner, the relationship, and conflict rules. This is

⁸¹ Michael P. Accordino and Bernard G. Guerney, Jr., "Relationship Enhancement Couples and Family Outcome Research of the Last 20 Years," *Family Journal* 11, no. 2 (April 2003): 162.

⁸² Jakubowsk, 530.

⁸³ Gregory W. Brock and Harvey Joanning, "A Comparison of the Relationship Enhancement Program and the Minnesota Couple Communication Program," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 9, no. 4 (Oct 1983): 413-21.

⁸⁴ Paul Giblin, D. H. Sprenkle, and R. Sheehan, "Enrichment Outcome Research: A Meta-Analysis of Premarital, Marital and Family Interventions," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 11, no. 3 (July 1985): 257-71.

done through the development of clear, direct, and open communication between the couple. Communication skills are taught through a series of interventions, such as directed practice, didactic presentations, and homework exercises.⁸⁵

CCP is offered in different formats. In one format, groups meet 2 hours weekly for 4 weeks. Structured educational presentations are followed by skill practice exercises under supervision. Instructors are certified after completion of a required 1- or 2-day training program.⁸⁶

CCP has also been extensively researched. The program proved highly effective for couples who are non-distressed, slightly distressed and highly distressed.⁸⁷ In one meta-analysis of 16 studies conducted by Butler and Wampler, findings concluded CCP to be effective in improving communication skills, particularly in the clinical setting.⁸⁸ Another study concluded that CCP increases participants' relationship satisfaction, improves self-esteem and self-concept, and improves the ability to work out problems in a constructive way so that both partners feel satisfied with the solutions reached.⁸⁹ Based on these and other research, CCP has been proven to be an efficacious program.

⁸⁵ Jakubowski, 530

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ R. G. Aldridge and C. H. Aldridge, "Couple Communication: An Analysis of Two Divergent Student Groups," *Corrective & Social Psychiatry & Journal of Behavior Technology, Methods & Therapy* 29 (1983): 36-38.

⁸⁸ Mark H Butler and Karen S. Wampler, "A Meta-Analytic Update of Research on the Couple Communication Program," *American Journal of Family Therapy* 27, no. 3 (July-Sept 1999): 223-237.

⁸⁹ W. A. Knights, Jr., L. Schneider, and R. Denardo, "The Minnesota Couples Communication Program and clinical Pastoral Education," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 39, no. 1 (Mar 1985): 43-48.

Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment (SHFE)

Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment (SHFE), developed by Everett Worthington and his research team, is a brief enrichment program focused on promoting love, faith and motivating the couples to take the initiative to work together to improve their relationship.⁹⁰

SHFE program consists of five 1-hour sessions. The sessions are designed to train couples in specific methods for achieving their marital goals by focusing on communication and intimacy. Educational consultants provide written feedback to couples about their conflict resolution skills, communication skills, positive behavior training, and intimacy building exercises.⁹¹

In three randomized controlled studies, SHFE has demonstrated to improve marital satisfaction, marital communication, and overall quality of life.⁹²

Hope Focus Marriage Counseling

Hope Focus Marriage Counseling was developed by Everett Worthington Jr. in 1999, ten years after he published his first book on marriage counseling, to meet the needs of the Christian community.⁹³ Worthington sums up his approach,

Hope-focused marriage counseling is my own blend of theories. It was originally most influenced by behavioral couples therapy, emotion-focused couples therapy and solution-focused therapy, among the secular

⁹⁰ Everett L. Worthington and Terry L. Hight, "Strategic Hope-Focused Relationship-Enrichment Counseling With Individual Couples," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 44, no. 4 (Oct 1997): 381.

⁹¹ G. A. Burchard, "A Study of Two Marital Enrichment Programs and Couples' Quality of Life," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (Sept 2003): 240-252.

⁹² Jakubowski, 531.

⁹³ Everett L. Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), xv.

theories. But the primary basis of the approach is my understanding of Christian marriage as derived from Scripture.⁹⁴

It is from this Christian approach that pastors can help couples to enrich their marriage. This approach is based on promoting hope and teaches couples different strategies to build faith, love and work into the relationship. The strategy used by Worthington is “faith working through love.”⁹⁵ This strategy is used to promote and inject hope into distressed couples. However, this researcher believes “conviction” is also needed in this strategy and therefore will be using “faith working through love from conviction.” Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment is designed with conviction as a key component.

Key Principles of Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling

Hope and Faith

Biblical hope is rooted and grounded in your faith in God. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, KJV). Christians are saved by faith with the hope of eternal life. The Bible teaches in Romans, “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Rom 8:24-25 NJKV). Biblical hope is “confidence expectation” in what God has promised. Faith and hope are complementary. Faith is grounded in the reality of the past; hope is looking to the reality of the future. Without faith, there is no hope, and

⁹⁴ Ibid., xxvii.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 32.

without hope there is no true faith.⁹⁶ Both faith and hope are required to restore couples who are in distress marriages.

While biblical faith (faith in God) is necessary in the process, faith in the counselor, faith in the interventions and faith in each other are also necessary, because faith always has an object and usually involves trust in the character of a person. The counselor must help couples build faith in the counselor (counselor must be confident), faith in the interventions (help couples see the need to work hard and complete all home works), and faith in each other (help couples see what their partner is going to make the marriage better).⁹⁷ Applying these strategies will help build faith and hope.

Research has shown that hope is an essential aspect of the quality of marriage. C. R. Snyder defined hope as “Mental willpower” plus “Waypower to meet goals.”⁹⁸ Willpower is the driving or motivating force in hopeful thinking while Waypower is the mental plans on reaching a goal.⁹⁹ If couples lose their desire or mental willpower and do not know of ways to meet their goal, they will lose hope.

Worthington added to this equation a third element: “waitpower to change,” or the time between the current situation and the change desired. The new equation becomes:¹⁰⁰

$$\text{Hope} = \frac{\text{Willpower}}{\text{to change}} + \frac{\text{Waypower to}}{\text{change}} + \frac{\text{Waitpower}}{\text{even if change to change is not happening}}$$

⁹⁶ Gotquestions.org, “What Does The Bible Say About Hope?”
<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-hope.html>

⁹⁷ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, 33-35.

⁹⁸ C. R. Snyder, *Psychology of Hope: You Can Get Here from There* (New York: Free Press, 2010), Kindle Edition, Location, 224.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Location 171-199.

¹⁰⁰ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, 30.

The idea conveyed is that couples must be willing (Love) to make their marriage better plus couples must have access to the ways in which to make their marriage better (Work) plus the faith in God to wait on their marriage to improve (Faith) while actively working to improve it. Waitpower is the willingness to press on even though one may not see change. Adding conviction at the beginning of this equation can intensify the willingness to change, the desire to work, and increases the couple's faith to wait on God.

Love

The often-used portion of Scripture on love is found in 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor 13:4-7 NIV).

True love seeks the highest good for others. Couples must choose to love if they desire change in their marriage. According to Worthington, love is a willingness to value the other person and an unwillingness to devalue the other person.¹⁰¹ Couples who are in distress must consciously choose to value their spouse even when they do not feel like it. Couples must also consciously choose not to devalue their spouse even when they feel the urge to do so.

Work

James rightfully said, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20 KJV). Couples must invest time and put in work in the marriage to make their marriage better. Work in hope focus counseling is a result of love and faith. The strategy Worthington uses is "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). He points out

¹⁰¹ Worthington, 33.

- Faith working through love is prescriptive for good marital relationships (as it is of all mutual discipleship relationships).
- Weaknesses in love, faith, or work (or combination of the three) are seen as the general cause of marital problems.
- Strengthening weakness in love, faith or work (or combinations) is seen as the general strategic solution to marital problems.¹⁰²

This strategy is effective in helping couples. However, as Christians, this researcher believes “conviction” is another very important element to this strategy. Weaknesses in conviction can be another cause of marital problems.

Hope Conquers Distress and Conviction

Hope Conquers Distress (HCD) stresses the need for conviction. Pastors must understand the meaning of conviction and convey this meaning to couples throughout the counseling sessions. The word convict is a translation of the Greek word *elegcho*, which means “to convince someone of the truth; to reprove; to accuse, refute, or cross-examine a witness.”¹⁰³ Conviction causes one to recognize a behavior that goes against a biblical teaching, moral standard or Christ-like characteristic that an individual has chosen to uphold. Couples who are in distress may say that they desire to change, or say that they want to work on their marriage, but lack conviction.

True conviction is not a guilty conscience, shame over sinful behaviors, or merely knowledge of right and wrong. True conviction, for a Christian, is when one becomes mindful of how much his or her sin dishonors God. When David was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he cried out, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps 51:4 KJV). When Joseph was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he said, “How

¹⁰² Ibid., 32.

¹⁰³ Strong’s Concordance, s. v. “elegcho.”

could I do this great evil and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9 KJV). If there is a desire for true lasting change to occur, it must come out of conviction, from deep within the hearts of both the husband and the wife.

It is out of true conviction that the strategy “Faith working through love from conviction” can guide the counseling session with couples who are in distress. Pastors must help couples see the need to be convicted by the Holy Spirit as they work on their marriage.

Pastors can help bring about conviction by having the couple do the following “Get Honest” exercise, where the couple gets honest with God, themselves and then each other.

“Get honest with God”

1. Have both couples reflect on one area that is causing problems in the marriage.
2. Have each partner pray a prayer like this, “Heavenly father, I am having tremendous difficulties in my marriage. Lord, I want you to show me, me. This is where I think I have fallen short but I want you to show me where else I have fallen short in this marriage” (when God shows you, write it down). Confess, repent, and ask forgiveness. Then say, “Help me to change God because my behavior is dishonoring you. When I am doing this to my spouse (list what God shows you), I am sinning against you God. Thank you for showing me, me. My desire is to change so that my marriage and family will be better, so that I can experience your peace, love, joy as I work on my marriage. I want to change because I love you and want to be more like you God.”

3. Have each partner write out the list for the pastor to review. True conviction should reveal some similarities in the issues causing distress.

Once a husband or wife is convicted by the Holy Spirit, the pastor can now assess areas for enrichment that need intervention.

Marriage Enrichment Target Areas for Couples

This section will address common areas in marriage that every pastor should understand. Hope Conquers Distress consists of twelve marriage enrichment target areas, and is based on the acronym, HOPECONQUERS. This program addresses:

- H- Healthy Beliefs and Values,
- O- Outlook on Marriage Vision,
- P- Peace through Confession and Forgiveness,
- E- Enriched Communication,
- C- Conflict Resolution,
- O- Obscured Thinking,
- N- Need to Cleave,
- Q- Quench Not Commitment,
- U- Unrelenting Problems,
- E- Effective Handling of Domestic Violence,
- R- Recovery from Addictions and Substance Abuse,
- S- Survival from Chronic Affairs and Adultery.

These twelve components will help the pastor assess the area or areas that need intervention. A brief description of each will be given in this section.

Healthy Beliefs and Values

Values and beliefs are related but different. Values refer to a set of ideas that guide an individual on how to evaluate right versus wrong. Beliefs are those things such as a set of doctrines, statements or experiences a person holds as true. Healthy beliefs and values are very important in marriage because everything a husband or wife does in marriage is based on their values and beliefs. Values often come from what one believes to be true.

Healthy Christian beliefs are based on the Bible. The Bible teaches that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1 KJV), God created man and woman in His image (Gen 1:27 KJV), God is sovereign ruler and involved in everyone's life (Ps 47:2 KJV), God ordained and honors marriage (Heb 13:4 KJV), God created us to honor and glorify Him (Is 43:7 KJV), the Scriptures are infallible, inerrant, and the sole and final authority for all matters of faith and conduct (2 Timothy 3:16; Cor 2:13 KJV), the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and that He is an abiding helper, teacher, and guide (John 6:13, 14:16-17 and 16:8-11 KJV) and with God all things are possible (Matt 19:26 KJV).

Since values come from beliefs and if you believe everything above to be true, you will value living in a way that honors God, you will value you spouse because they are created in the image of God, you will value your marriage because God ordained it, you will value any help to make your marriage better because you believe with God all things are possible. Pastors must help distressed couples explore central values and beliefs because this area will also determine the couple's convictions to honor God.

Outlook on Marriage Vision

A clear vision of the marriage is needed for success. However, the outlook of the marriage vision is sometimes blurred when couples are in distress. Prov 29:18 KJV

reminds us, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” For every couple, there are three parts to the main vision for their marriage: the concept of the actual marriage (the way the person perceives the marriage), the true marriage (the way the marriage really is), and the way a person thinks the marriage should be (what they envision an ideal marriage to be).¹⁰⁴ Couples must be able to have a vision of their marriage even when the marriage is in distress.

Pastor must help couples formulate a vision statement. This can be done following these steps:¹⁰⁵

- 1) Visualize yourself ten years from now and talk about where you would like to be and what you would like your marriage to look like.
- 2) Prepare a 10-year time line chart.
- 3) List any obstacles you might encounter as you try to implement this plan.
- 4) Think of ways that you might overcome each obstacle.
- 5) Write how you would feel 10 years from now if you achieved this plan.

The idea behind the marriage vision is to bring about a sense of being excited and proud about your marriage. In distressed marriages, this exercise can sometimes cause additional conflict; thus, couples can be encouraged to write separate vision statements.¹⁰⁶

Peace through Confession and Forgiveness

The Bible declares, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom 12:18). The dictionary defines peace as, “freedom from disturbance;

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

quiet and tranquility.” This is seldom experienced by couples whose marriage is in distress. One way that pastors can help couples to experience peace is through confession and forgiveness.

Confession and forgiveness are important in marital reconciliation. In all fairness, both are difficult but “without forgiveness, commitment will unravel and the marriage will come apart” since “forgiveness is the glue that holds commitment together.”¹⁰⁷ The Bible teaches, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Confession is to recognize one’s own wrongdoing and the decision to change course by doing what is right.

There are three general responses when a spouse wants to address an issue with the other spouse: denial- I did not do anything wrong (conflict); justification- Yes, I did something wrong but I was right in doing wrong; excuse- reason (reason could be reasonable) but must come after if couples would like to reduce conflict.¹⁰⁸

The process of seeking forgiveness if one partner hurt the other is by using this acronym, CONFESS.¹⁰⁹

- C:** Confess without excuse (Hun, I was wrong to curse you out)
- O:** Offer apology (convey sincere regret and contrition) (I’m sorry for cursing you out)
- N:** Note his or her pain (empathically show that you understand the pain or anger you caused) (I see that I really hurt you when I cursed you out)

¹⁰⁷ Worthington, 128.

¹⁰⁸ Light University, *Marriage Works: Enriching Your Marriage and Encouraging Others* (Light University, 2006), 309.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 309.

- F:** Forever Value (say that you value the person) (I really care for you, I messed up and I didn't intend to hurt you)
- E:** Equalize (Offer to make some restitution: Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?)
- S:** Swear never to do it again (I'll never do this again)
- S:** Seek forgiveness (Can you forgive me for what I did?) Now you can ask your spouse if he or she would like to know the reason why you did what you did.

One cannot seek forgiveness if one does not first confess. Confession is critical for healing distressed marriage. The hardness of the heart must be softened before forgiveness can penetrate the heart. After confession, it is up to the other spouse to forgive or to harden the heart.¹¹⁰ Sometimes, the spouse who is hurting is hesitant to forgive. On the other hand, sometimes the spouse who has done the hurting pushes for the spouse to forgive and to move on. A misunderstanding of forgiveness can lead to situations like this. Pastors must help clear up common misunderstandings of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not based on what is fair. Rom 5:8 (NET) states "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It was not fair for Jesus to die for us, but he chose to do so by an act of the will. Forgiveness is an act of the will. It's not based on feelings or circumstances. It is a choice.

Forgiveness is not just excusing or condoning (declaring that the act was not wrong) bad behavior. Unacceptable behavior is without excuse. In forgiveness, a person admits that the act was wrong but chooses to forgive anyway. The person chooses to

¹¹⁰ Worthington, 63.

forgive, not because they are weak or like a doormat, but because they are strong enough to be like Christ.

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. It takes one to forgive but two to reconcile. One might fully forgive and choose not to reconcile, if reconciliation would put an individual in harm's way. One may forgive a physically abusive spouse, but if he or she is unrepentant and does not seek help to change, one may choose not to reconcile. Both forgiveness and reconciliation are needed to produce strong lasting marriages.

Pastors can help guide couples through the process of forgiveness by following these steps:¹¹¹ 1) remind couples that their goal is reconciliation of the marriage; 2) help them experience the pain, write it out if necessary; 3) help both husband and wife empathize (being able to feel as the other feels and think as the other thinks); 4) help each person reflect on his or her own capability of inflicting hurt; 5) help each person recall times that he or she has been forgiven (you can start with Christ but end with a natural person in their life); 6) provide an opportunity for each person to say aloud that he or she forgives their spouse; 7) discuss the maintenance of forgiveness (when it still hurts, or dwelling on hurt, new resentments, the need to release the spouse to God).¹¹²

Confession and forgiveness pave the way for reconciliation. Reconciliation can be more complex since it also involves a mutual effort to behave with trustworthiness prior to the achievement of reconciliation.¹¹³ Both the husband and wife need to become experts in both confession and forgiveness. For reconciliation to take place, both partners

¹¹¹ Ibid., 136.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 63.

must acknowledge when they feel hurt but put aside bitterness, revenge and a desire for separation. Forgiveness is a free-gift to the one who has broken trust. Reconciliation is restored relationship based on restored trust. Forgiveness is extended even if never earned, reconciliation is offered to the offender because it has been earned: the other person has done what is necessary to restore the trust.

There are many godly benefits to forgiveness. Forgiveness unleashes God's blessings on your life. Un-forgiveness can block God's blessings on an individual's life. The Bible teaches, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you" (Matt 6: 14-15 KJV).

Forgiveness frees the couple from bitterness and anger. An unforgiving partner may be a bitter person. They may be judgmental (focusing on the other partner's wrong), critical and always waiting to rejoice when something goes wrong. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you" (Heb 12:14-15 KJV).

Forgiveness is of God and causes us to walk in the light. God is pleased when we forgive. Just like the master was angry when the servant did not want to forgive in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:21-35 KJV), God feels the same about us when we do not forgive each other. Lastly, a forgiving person's heart is joyful and full of love.

Enriched Communication

“Communication is the lifeblood of marriage.”¹¹⁴ It is no surprise that many couples who are in distress marriages have major communication issues. Communication is not just the words used; it also includes nonverbal behavior and tone. Nonverbal behavior must be carefully addressed in communication in couples who are in distress. This is not surprising after noting the statistics: “nonverbal communication accounts for 58 percent of the total message. Tone of voice makes up 35 percent of the message. The actual words you say account for only 7 percent of the total message.”¹¹⁵ This area causes many problems in marriages because one partner may say “yes” with a tone that says “no.”

Speaking the “truth in love” (Eph 4:15) is one very effective way to enrich communication between couples. Speaking the truth in love builds healthy family relationships. Since love, based on 1 Cor 13:4-7, is seeking the highest good of the other person, speaking the truth in love does the same. Truth may vent the facts (your breath stinks) but when balanced with love (You know what, I want to share something with you that I am not sure if you are aware of; I have observed on a couple occasions that your breath smells a little funny, so I wanted to let you know so maybe you can get it checked out by a dentist), can make communication better.

Couples can carelessly not communicate truth when one partner uses words like “never and always.” You may have heard these phrases before: A wife may say, “You never listen to me,” or a husband may say, “You always put me down.” It may be true

¹¹⁴ Les Parrott and Leslie L. Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before--and After--your Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 79.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 84.

that at times in the past or presently the husband may not be listening or the wife may have put down her husband, but if there was at least one time that the husband did listen or the wife did not put down her husband, then that statement is not true.

The goal of communication is to build up so that each spouse “will grow” (Eph. 4:15). Communicating truth in love gives the spouse an opportunity to change for the better. Couples must learn the principle of “Leveling and Editing.”¹¹⁶ Leveling is speaking the truth in love. Couples should level when a spouse feels isolated or bored. Couples should not level when one spouse feels angry, often argues or puts down or insults the spouse.

Editing is simply not saying hurtful or negative comments to a spouse. Pastors must help couples understand that not everything one thinks, one should say. A reminder of James is very helpful here, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19 KJV).

Communicating Through Love Languages

According to John Gottman’s research, a 5 to 1 ratio of positive to negative interactions predicts a good marriage. Anything lower than 5 to 1 predicts poor marriage. A simple solution to maintaining a positive marital environment is to increase the positive interactions and decrease the negative interactions. Couples can use Gary Chapman’s “Love Languages” to attempt to establish a ratio of at least 5:1.¹¹⁷

Chapman points out that couples sometimes communicate love differently from the way love is perceived. The goal is to communicate love in ways the spouse receives,

¹¹⁶ Worthington, 160.

¹¹⁷ Light University, *Marriage Works*, 306.

rather than the ways that we prefer. Generally, people show love in the way they wish to receive love. The five love languages are as follows:

- **Words of Affirmation (1 Cor 8:1)**- Saying “I love you, you are an amazing husband [wife] or you look beautiful,” are all examples of sincerely admiring or praising your partner, sincerely complementing your partner and expressing your positive feelings in words.
- **Acts of Service (1 John 3:18)** - Doing nice things for the other spouse, e.g., cleaning the house. If this is one of the love language of a wife, she will feel valued and loved when her husband helps out around the home.
- **Gifts (John 3:16)** - Giving gifts to others. The gift does not have to be big, but the thought of giving a gift makes the person with this love language feel loved.
- **Physical Touch or closeness (Mark 10:13-16)** - People with this love language like when they are touched. It can be patting, rubbing, head rubs, back rubs, foot tickles etc. Being near to each other or putting an arm around the other, make the person with this love language feel loved.
- **Quality Time (Mark 3:14)**- A person with this love language feels most loved when they are hanging out together and spending exclusive time together with their spouse.

Pastors can help couples explore love languages by doing the love language exercise.¹¹⁸

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts in every relationship are inevitable. Two reasonable people can have divergent positions on the same thing. The idea that conflict is only negative may

¹¹⁸ Exercise 7 in Workshop Manual: Appendix B.

contribute to the desire to always have the “right view.” Couples can be encouraged to accept that it is okay to view the same thing differently. Pastors must help couples deal with conflict in ways that values each other and does not devalue each other. Conflicts can arise for different reasons. When people differ, pastors must help them to resolve some of the differences, accept some of the differences, and deal with the differences in love.¹¹⁹

Personality differences can sometimes create conflicts. Men and women are different and to make a marriage work and reduce conflicts, these differences must be recognized and appreciated. Men have a tendency to focus on achievements; women have a tendency to focus on relationships. Men have a tendency to focus on future goals and need to believe in the practical value of that goal, while women tend to focus on feelings and activities of the present.¹²⁰ Pastors can recognize if this area is a source of conflict by having the couples complete the “Personality Characteristics” exercise.¹²¹

The following additional strategies are aimed to help couples deal with conflict in their marriage, as it is very important for couples to seek God for wisdom and guidance to deal with conflicts in their relationship.

The first strategy is to be mindful of how one partner says things and always tell the truth. It can be the difference between a regular conversation and a fight. Communicating truth in love, as discussed earlier, can help reduce conflicts. Communication issues sometimes increase conflicts between couples. Communication

¹¹⁹ Worthington, 169.

¹²⁰ Parrott, *Saving your Marriage Before it Starts*, 104.

¹²¹ Exercise 8 in Workshop Manual: Appendix B

involves both speaking and listening. One researcher observed that “most people think they listen, but don’t really hear each other.”¹²²

To help couples listen better, pastors can use the “Listener- Talker Card” exercise. Petersen, through his research, realized that the roles of talking and listening were substantially different. The card reminds the couples to listen first, talk second and “forces us [the couple] to observe the roles we play.”¹²³ The Talker side of the card states: I’m most bothered. I own the problem. It describes the goals of talking as: to share my feelings and to share my thoughts. Then it reminds the talker to talk without accusing, attacking, judging labeling. The Listener side of the card states: I’m calm enough to hear. I don’t own the problem. The goals of the listener are to provide safety, to understand, and to clarify. Then it reminds the listener to listen without agreeing, disagreeing, advising, or defending.

The second strategy is to never let the sun go down while one or both partners are still angry (Eph 4:26 KJV). It is nearly impossible to resolve every conflict before bedtime, but it is vitally important to resolve them as quickly as possible. Couples should be careful not to pursue the other spouse when there are clear signs of disengagement or if there will be increased conflict. Proverbs 30:33 (NLT) says, “As the beating of cream yields butter and striking the nose causes bleeding, so stirring up anger causes quarrels.” Sometimes, it is best to put the issue aside and address it at another time.

The third strategy is to be kind and forgiving to one another (Eph 4:32 KJV). Pastors must guide couples through the process of forgiveness as discussed previously.

¹²² James C. Petersen, *Why Don't We Listen Better? Communicating and Connecting in Relationships* (Tigard, OR: Petersen Publications, 2007), 7.

¹²³ Ibid., 55.

Conflict resolution also involves reconciliation of the couples. Reconciliation includes confession of one's hurtfulness and forgiveness of the other person's hurtfulness.

The last strategy is to not criticize each other when conflicts arise. Some couples do not recognize that there is a difference between complaining and criticizing.

Complaining usually begins with the word *I*, and criticism with the word *you*.¹²⁴

Pastors can also guide couples through a current conflict situation by letting them go through the "Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict."¹²⁵ This exercise can be used to help couples take a closer look at how conflicts can be resolved, while remaining respectful to each other.

Obscured Thinking

The Bible states, "As he [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7 KJV). In marriage, what one person thinks about oneself, one's spouse, and the relationship can sometimes determine if the marriage will survive. What one thinks, controls how one acts, how one communicates, how one treats their spouse and how one views their marriage. Obscured and negative thinking in marriage can turn a good relationship to a bad relationship.

Negative thinking in marriage develops when conflict and anger build up over time. Negative thinking changes the couple's perception of their marriage and in the process, devalues the spouse. One spouse may begin seeing the intentions and motives of the other spouse as bad. Even when things aren't as bad as they seem, one spouse may be convinced that something is wrong with the other spouse. Then, what psychologist calls,

¹²⁴ Parrott, 123.

¹²⁵ Exercise 9 in Workshop Manual: Appendix B.

“confirmation bias”¹²⁶ steps in. This is selective perception that emphasizes all that is bad and ignores that which is good (or vice-versa).

The following example will show how negative thinking changes our emotions. You can think yourself sad, you can think yourself angry or you can think yourself pleasant. Let us say you are in a heated argument with your spouse, emotions running high, and then the phone rings. It is a call you are expecting and must take. You decide to walk away, pick up the phone and calmly say, “Hello” as you think, “I need to be calm and pleasant in answering the phone.” Soon after you hang up the phone, you start thinking back on the situation that got you heated before.

This example points out that different thoughts produce different emotions and behaviors. If this is true, and this writer believe this to be true, then the key to transformation of self and the marriage begins by changing negative thinking to positive thinking. Positive thinking will change negative emotions and negative behaviors in a marriage.

Using the strategy of faith working through love from conviction, pastors can help couples recognize and change negative thoughts and replace them with thoughts about how each should value and love each other. Pastors must help couples avoid blaming each other by getting them to think of being responsible for their own behavior and how they can improve it.¹²⁷ As a couple changes focus to living by faith and working through love from conviction, change will begin to come to the marriage.

The Bible states in Philippians

¹²⁶ Light University, 45.

¹²⁷ Worthington, 169.

Finally, believers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable and worthy of respect, whatever is right and confirmed by God's word, whatever is pure and wholesome, whatever is lovely and brings peace, whatever is admirable and of good repute; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think continually on these things [center your mind on them, and implant them in your heart] (Phil 4:8 AMP).

Since the goal is to reduce negative thinking that devalues and replace it with positive thinking that values each other, a pastor can help the couple by having them answer the questions on the following exercise from Phil 4:8.

Positive Thinking Exercise

1. Whatever is true about your spouse? Pastor should help couple think of their spouse as a child of God.
2. Whatever is honorable and worthy of respect? Pastor should help couple think of your spouse as a treasure and treat him or her as a treasure. The idea is for the couple to have a treasuring attitude toward each other.
3. Whatever is lovely and brings peace? Pastor should help couple think about the good times they had together. Take it back to wedding day if needed. Think about ways to bring about peace. Pastor should help couple understand that it is okay to give their spouse the "benefit of the doubt" and stop the tendency to assume the worst about their spouse.
4. Whatever is admirable and of good report? Let the couple write down a list of admirable things about their spouse and think on them. Also, by faith, write down some things they do not see but would like to see.
5. Finally, if there is anything worthy of praise? Have the couple write it down and think on these things.

This exercise can be the starting point in helping change the couple's negative thinking into more positive thinking. This new thinking will help couples grow closer to each other.

Need to Cleave

Gen 2:24 (KJV) states, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." The purpose for marriage is to fulfil God's covenant while keeping "oneness" as the goal for marriage. The goal of oneness helps to bring about closeness in marriage.

The three aspects of oneness are: oneness in body (physical union- sexual intimacy in marriage), oneness in mind (to understand the mind of your spouse means each partner is attempting to understand their partner's thoughts, plans, purpose and perspectives), and oneness in soul¹²⁸ (the soul is purified and protected by the truth and the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:22)¹²⁹).

When couples truly cleave to each other, closeness is the result. According to Worthington, "closeness is composed of a balance of distance, coaction and intimacy."¹³⁰ Distance means that the husband or wife chooses to perform activities alone; for example, studying, listening to music with headset or reading. Coaction includes performing activities with someone else, platonically;¹³¹ for example, the wife may go shopping with

¹²⁸ The human soul is the part of a person that is not physical. It is the part of every human being that lasts eternally after the body experiences death. The human soul is created by God (Jer 38:16), it can be lost or saved (James 1:21; Ezek 18:4).

¹²⁹ Peter puts it this way, you can "purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart" (1 Pet 1:22).

¹³⁰ Worthington, 68.

¹³¹ Without any sexual inclinations.

a girlfriend or the husband may go bike riding with his buddies. Coaction is performing activities together, e.g. going to dinner as a couple, doing the laundry as a couple, or playing game together. Intimacy includes activities that produce “oneness,” e.g., sexual intimacy, sharing deep secrets to each other, sharing feelings and thoughts.

Pastors must help couples build their level of closeness with each other. The CLEAVE¹³² exercise can help couples build closeness and is a combination of some of the previous exercises.

CLEAVE exercise.

- C:** Change actions to positive - The Love Language exercise can be helpful here. Pastors must encourage couples to make a list of 10 loving actions to show love to their spouse and do them regularly. The idea is to maintain a 5:1 positive to negative ratio by increasing the positives and reducing the negatives.
- L:** Loving Romance - Couples are encouraged to reflect on how they showed romance when things were going well and attempt to show romance again.
- E:** Employ a calendar - Couples should adjust levels of distance, coaction, and intimacy by using a calendar to schedule activities. If coaction is the issue, then rearrange calendar to meet that need.
- A:** Adjust intimacy elsewhere - Sometimes needs (not sexual), can be met outside the marriage if one partner does not have the same need level. For example, couples can share thoughts and plans with a close friend or have a prayer partner if those needs are conflicting with the spouse’s needs.
- V:** Value your partner- When a husband or wife feels valued, they generally feel closer to the one who is valuing them.
- E:** Enjoy yourselves sexually - Sex is good and should be enjoyed by both the husband and the wife. Learn to communicate with each other on how to be

¹³²Ibid., 219.

better lovers. Ask your spouse, “Tell me how I can better please you,” or
“Show me how I can better please you.”

Sexual intimacy can sometimes bring issues when couples are in distress. Pastors can help couples to change through conviction by sharing, “Twelve Biblical Principles for Heightening Sexual Intimacy”¹³³ as follows.

Principle One: Genesis 2:24-25. God made man and woman sexual beings and pronounced his entire creation good. It would be a mistake to think that sex or sexual feelings were bad.

Principle Two: Song of Solomon 2:7; Proverbs 5: 1-23; Proverbs 23:1-8. It is not God’s will that you somehow consign the sexual dimensions of your personhood to extinction. As with other appetites you must assume personal responsibility for control. Control, not extinction, is his plan.

Principle Three: Song of Solomon 8:6. The only legitimate satisfaction of the sexual appetite is within covenantal commitment. This covenantal commitment is marriage and derives its legitimacy from its pledge to honor social and spiritual sanctions.

Principle Four: Hebrews 13:4. Sex within the covenantal context and under control is not just good, it is holy.

Principle Five: Romans 1:21-28. Some sexual relationships represent a form of idolatry fashioned in the midst of personal fear and rebellion.

Principle Six: Proverbs 5:18, 19. The sexual appetite was not just placed in humans to assure procreation. It was God’s intent that it also be the source of intense pleasure for his children.

Principle Seven: Genesis 4:1. Sexual intercourse is more than a physical act. It is a very special kind of knowing that implies deep communion, sharing, and total self-giving.

Principle Eight: Song of Solomon 4:12; 1Thessalonians 4: 1-7; Proverbs 5:15-23; Ecclesiastes 6:9; 1 Peter 1:13-16. Sex, because of its intense nature, cannot bring ultimate joy to the participants without a complete commitment from both partners to the exclusiveness that monogamy guarantees. The absence of fidelity to one partner till death parts is a violation of divine law and produces internal rage in the person being victimized by the infidelity. Even sexual fantasy divorced from the covenantal mate can diminish the joy of sex derived from monogamous coupling.

¹³³ Ronald E. Hawkins, *Strengthening Marital Intimacy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 105.

Principle Nine: 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. Sexual intercourse is a part of the marital relationship that is absolutely necessary for the production of genuine and full unity in marriage. Only in cases where it is made impossible by other compelling reasons should its absence from marriage relationships be viewed as acceptable. In these cases, both partners should understand the reasons for its absence or for their willing consent to its absence.

Principle Ten: 1 Corinthians 7: 1-5. Sex should be viewed not only as a way of getting one's needs met but primarily as a way of serving one's mate. Refusal to meet a mate's sexual needs in a wholesome and healthy manner is a sin.

Principle Eleven: 1 Corinthians 7: 1-5. Sex is a reciprocal right based on the reality that your body belongs to your mate. This scriptural teaching is not intended to be a license for spouse abuse but rather to emphasize the joy that spouses derive from serving one another in a satisfying and healthy sexual manner. In such a setting, sex is personal and holy, a complex meeting of both mates' feelings, thoughts, and sensations.

Principle Twelve: Genesis 2:18-25. Sex is fully satisfying only when two persons possessed of expanding individual identities come to the experience. Each one comes prepared to give and demand. Each one remains intermittently independent and dependent. Both fill the void in the other and discover in the filling a developing fullness in themselves.¹³⁴

These principles can help couples to see the importance of sexual intimacy in marriage. Sex can be viewed as the "life-uniting act" that glues two people together in a way that changes their lives forever, and for that reason, sex can increase closeness in a marriage.¹³⁵ Couples can benefit from a clearer understanding of God's design for sexual intimacy in marriage.

Quench Not Commitment

Commitment is another critical component to marriage. A Christian marriage is a covenant, not just a contract. Both are forms of commitment. Worthington points out,

Contractual commitment depends on reciprocity or exchange....

Contractual commitment is built on mutual need fulfillment and breeds

¹³⁴ Hawkins's 12 principles.

¹³⁵ Stanton L. Jones and Brenna B. Jones, *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex: A Lifelong Approach to Shaping Your Child's Sexual Character* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 130.

mutual dependency. When needs are not fulfilled, though, contractual commitment can erode.¹³⁶

Covenantal commitment is based on the biblical principle that marriage is a union of man and woman before God. Matthew points this out when Jesus said,

Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate (Matt 19:4-6 NJKV).

Covenants are stronger binding than contracts. Pastors must help couple recognize that God blesses and treasures those who keep his covenant. Moses points this out in Exodus 19:5 (NKJV) when God said, “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.” The same is true with God and his marriage covenant.

Pastors should also encourage commitment in other areas as well. Commitment to trying to change, commitment to attending counseling and applying the strategies or suggestions. The pastor must also realize that commitment cannot be coerced since people do not respond well to coercion.¹³⁷ Once the couple begins to quench commitment, the marriage may not survive because divorce becomes an option.

The biggest threat to commitment is divorce. According to Bank’s research, the Christian divorce rate is higher than of 42%.¹³⁸ Complicating issues such as abuse, physiological issues and addiction can aide to this divorce rate. Couples may try to get the pastor to agree with them to get a divorce. The pastor may be asked, “Should we

¹³⁶ Worthington, 69.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 239.

¹³⁸ Banks, “Christians Question Divorce Statistics.”

divorce or should we stay together for the kids?”¹³⁹ Pastors must let couples decide the option for divorce themselves. Pastors can still be of tremendous help by presenting marriage counseling as another viable option. God’s plan is for marriages to be healed and to be restored.

Unrelenting Problems

Pastors on the “front lines” may sense unrelenting and complicating problems while speaking with the couples. What is a pastor to do when there are clear signs of spousal abuse or clear signs of addictions or patterns of chronic affairs? These are examples of complicating problems that hope can still conquer. These unrelenting problems will now be briefly discussed.

Effective Handling of Domestic Violence

Pastors must be aware and equipped to handle domestic violence cases effectively. Domestic violence is a sad reality that has invaded the church. The U.S Office on Violence against Women defines domestic violence as a

pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.¹⁴⁰

Pastors must be able to recognize the circular patterns associated with domestic violence. Clinton and Hawkins describe the pattern of behavior in three steps: 1) tension builds and

¹³⁹ Worthington, 246.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, “Domestic Violence,” <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence> (accessed December 26, 2017).

the abuser loses control, 2) battering occurs and 3) remorse.¹⁴¹ The batterer may sometimes feel the victim deserves it and rationalize the abuse. In the remorse stage, the batterer may seem truly repentant, but this is usually due to the reduced tension and the feeling that the victim “has learned her [or his] lesson.”¹⁴²

Since domestic violence is more about power and control, pastors can use the following information wheels,¹⁴³ shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, to gain a broader perspective.

¹⁴¹ Timothy E. Clinton, and Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling: Personal and Emotional Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 95-96.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁴³ Domestic Violence Council, *Domestic Violence Resource Guide for Faith Leaders* (Maricopa, AZ: Association of Government, 2001), 53, 57.

Power and Control



Figure 1: Power and Control Wheel

Abuse of Children



Figure 2: Abuse of Children Wheel.

Pastors can also ask the following questions to gain more information about the abuse.

- “What’s it like for you at home?”
- “What happens when you and your partner disagree?”
- “Do you have to account for your time?”
- “Are you ever afraid of your partner?”
- “Does your partner push you around or hit you?”¹⁴⁴

Safety must be the number one concern for the victim. Proverbs 22:3 (NIV)

states, “The prudent see danger and take refuge.” Pastors must help a victim make a plan should the abuse occur again. The safety plan should include the appropriate emergency

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 13.

numbers to call—police, a family shelter, a trusted friend—and the place they may go. Victims should also have a photo copy of important documents packed in a bag with essentials. If the victim must leave after the next abusive episode, he or she should do so calmly and go to the predetermined location.¹⁴⁵

Pastors must help victims understand that they are not responsible for the abuse. There is no excuse for abuse and therefore the pastor must encourage the victim to allow the abuser to experience the consequences for his or her behavior. Proverbs 19:19 (NIV) states, “A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty; rescue them, and you will have to do it again.”

The pastor may also have the opportunity to meet with the abuser, if a member of the church. The pastor must be clear that abuse is sin that needs to stop. Ephesians 4:26 (KJV) states, “Be angry and sin not.” The abuser must take responsibility and stop blaming the spouse for the abuse. The abuser must understand that there are consequences which include “legal intervention, church discipline and separation.”¹⁴⁶

Pastors should also let the abuser “Get honest with God,” as conviction will allow the abuser to see the need for change. Pastors must also warn that “Whoever remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy” (Prov. 29:1 NIV). The pastor must also sense if there is true godly sorrow. 2 Cor 7:10 (NIV) states, “Godly sorrow brings repentance....and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

¹⁴⁵ Clinton, 98.

¹⁴⁶ Light University, 221.

Pastors can guide the abuser through the “Seven Dips of Healing” based on the story in 2 Kings 5 of Naaman’s healing as follows:

1. Needs new skills in problem solving. (he [she] has used power and control as the way to solve problems).
2. He [she] needs to learn how to take orders rather than give them. Giving up control, putting himself [herself] under authority- the church, the counselor, the law.
3. He [she] needs to learn how to appropriately express his [her] feelings without abuse, intimidating or manipulation.
4. He [she] needs to learn to allow his [her] wife [husband] to be separate and disagree and differ with him [her] without feeling terrified of abandonment.
5. He [she] needs to learn how to speak directly about what he [she] needs and to trust others are there to be there and care.
6. He [she] needs to learn how to handle the hurt and disappointment that inherently comes when people who care let us down.
7. He [she] needs to take the initiative and responsibility to meet his [her] own needs rather than demanding that his [her] wife [husband] always do so.¹⁴⁷

It is God’s will to restore the abuser if he or she is truly repentant and sees the need for change through conviction.

Recovery from Addictions and Substance Abuse

Addictions and substance abuse can cause distress in a marriage. Pastors can help couples to recover by first understanding the two perspectives of addiction. The first perspective is where addiction means “to become physiologically or psychologically dependent on a habit-forming substance.” For example, a spouse could be addicted to drugs, pornography, gambling, and/or alcohol. The second perspective is where addiction means “to occupy (oneself) with or involve (oneself) in something habitually or compulsively.”¹⁴⁸ For example, a spouse could be addicted to work, shopping, social media or the gym. Addictions can further complicate marriages that are in distress.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 223-225.

¹⁴⁸ FreeDictionary.com, s.v. “addiction.”

The Bible teaches, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1 NASB). Ephesians 5:18 (JNV) says, “Do not be drunk with wine,.... but be filled with the Holy Spirit.” The contrast in this verse is powerful. Pastors must be able to convey to the counselee that if he or she wants to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, he or she cannot be controlled by wine. Whatever someone depends on controls them.

Alcohol accounted for 31% of all fatal accidents in US in 2014.¹⁴⁹ Research has shown that more than 8 million children live with parents who are substance abusers. Substance abuse exists in 40 to 80 percent of families in which the children are victims of abuse.¹⁵⁰ Alcohol can increase the chance of physical and emotions abuse in the marriage.

The statistics on pornography is also alarming. In this year, 2017, a quarter of a billion people are expected to be accessing mobile adult content from their phones or tablets, an increase of more than 30% from 2013.¹⁵¹ In the church, 51% of pastors say internet pornography is a possible temptation. 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women say they watch porn at least once a month.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ National Highway and Traffic Safety, “Traffic Safety Facts - Alcohol-Impaired Driving,” 2014, <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812231> (accessed April 3, 2017).

¹⁵⁰ National Counsel on Child Abuse & Family Violence, “Parental Substance Abuse a Major Factor in Child Abuse and Neglect,” 2015, <http://www.nccafv.org/parentalsubstanceabuse.htm> (accessed April 3, 2017).

¹⁵¹ “Covenant Eyes: Internet Accountability and Filtering,” <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/> (accessed April 3, 2017).

¹⁵² Ibid.

Once the pastor senses an addiction, it is important for the pastor to understand that a key characteristic of addiction is denial.¹⁵³ Pastors can gain valuable insight based on how the counselee answers the following questions:

1. Has anyone ever suggested that your use of _____ is a problem? If so, why do you think the person said that?
2. Have you ever been concerned about your use of _____? If so, why? How about when _____ happened? You don't think that _____ is a problem? You wouldn't consider it a problem if you saw it in your best friend or spouse?
3. How often do you use this substance and how much at each use? So in an average week you are using at least _____ times and doing so to get high every time?
4. Do you ever hide your use from family members or friends? You mean if they were sitting here with us now, they would agree to knowing all about the number of times you used each week?
5. At what age did you first use _____? Do you remember when you began using every week/weekend/day?
6. Have you ever done anything while under the influence of _____ that you later regretted? Have you ever had a conviction or ticket for driving under the influence? Have you ever been arrested for assault or domestic abuse? Have the police ever shown up at your house to deal with your _____-related behavior even if it didn't result in arrest?
7. Did anyone in your family of origin use a substance in excess while you were growing up? What did this person do? Did he [she] ever get free of it? Do you remember how you felt when you saw this person using _____?
8. Has your use of _____ ever affected your job or your family? What happened? Are you under any current threats from your boss or spouse that, if you use again, there will be some action on his or her part against you?
9. Have you ever quit or tried to quit using? How long were your sober? What happened when you quit? How did you feel? How did your spouse/children/boss respond to you when you were sober? What would it take now to accomplish that again?
10. Do you want to quit for good? If "for good" seems too impossible to comprehend, how long are you willing to stay sober if you tried it again? Who could best help you stay sober if you gave it a try? What will/should happen if you relapse again?
11. How do you see your life improving if you can quit using _____? How will things improve with your spouse/children/boss if you quit and clean up?

¹⁵³ Clinton, 15.

12. Is your faith or is God a resource to turn to for strength in this struggle? How has God helped you get and stay sober in the past?¹⁵⁴

Addictions can add complications to a marriage already in distress but a desire to change can be a new beginning towards healing for the couple.

Survival from Chronic Affairs and Adultery

Affairs and adultery can complicate the marriage and further the distress.

Adultery happens when one person has a sexual relationship with someone other than their spouse. Adultery can also be an emotional affair which can be even more devastating on the marriage.¹⁵⁵ An emotional affair occurs when a husband or wife looks to someone outside the marriage for support. Most affairs begin as friendships. Studies show that 45-55% of married women and 50-60% of married men engage in adultery at one time or another during their relationship.¹⁵⁶ These numbers are alarming and pastors should understand the different patterns of infidelity and the process of recovery as shown in Table 2 below.¹⁵⁷ Pastors can help couples to survive this hurtful stage in distressed marriages.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 16-17.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵⁶ Joan D. Atwood and Limor Schwartz, "Cybersex: The New Affair Treatment Considerations," *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy* 1, no. 3(2002): 37-56.

¹⁵⁷ Light University, 231.

CHARACTERISTICS	CLASS I	CLASS II	CLASS III
Biblical Illustrations	David & Bathsheba	Samson & Delilah	Eli's Sons
Description	A one- Night Stand	A Long- Term Relationship	Multiple Partners
Development	Immediate	Gradual	Impulsive
Emotional Involvement	None	Intense	None
Sexual Activity	Single Experience; Intense, Lustful, Passionate	Only Much Later in Relationship—After Friendship Established	Immediate and Repeated with Multiple Partners and Increasing Distorted Sexual Activity
Remorse/ Repentance	Usually Immediate and Intense	Initially None; Only Grief for Lost Relationship	Only After Acting-Out Episode; Internal Tension Until Another Episode is Inevitable
Recovery	Can be Immediate with Forgiveness	Long-Term Process with Marital Therapy	Sobriety First; Then Individual Therapy; Marital Therapy Later

Table 2: Different Patterns of Infidelity

Questioning the unfaithful spouse can help gauge the level of emotional involvement and the strategy needed for repentance, forgiveness and possibly reconciliation. If the unfaithful spouse would like to work towards reconciliation, then the pastor can explore the reasons that perpetuated the affair. The pastor can also ask the following questions:

- Are you aware of what needs you were seeking to have met from this relationship?
- What do you see are the effects on your spouse of your having an affair? How do you feel about what has happened to him [her]?
- Is any part of you happy or justified that your spouse was hurt?

- Are you willing to take full responsibility for your actions without placing any blame on your spouse?
- Are you willing now to be accountable for your time and relationships on a daily basis?
- Are you willing to pursue professional counseling?¹⁵⁸

The pastor must allow the faithful spouse to grieve out the hurt. According to Clinton and Trent, the following five stages of grieving can be experienced at any time, in rapid succession or repeated at any time.¹⁵⁹

- *Shock and Denial*: The “No, not me” stage is when the hurting spouse is unwilling to accept the reality of the spouse’s affair.
- *Anger*: The “Why me?” stage is when the spouse is aware of hurt and feels anger against the unfaithful spouse.
- *Bargaining*: The “If I do this, you’ll do that” stage is when the faithful spouse bargains to avoid more pain.
- *Depression*: The “It really happened” stage is when the wounded spouse realizes the impact of the infidelity on the marriage and mourn the loss of what the relationship once was.
- *Acceptance*: The “This is what happened” stage is when the faithful spouse has come to terms the infidelity and is willing to move forward.

It is in the acceptance stage that the decision for reconciliation can be fully realized by the faithful spouse. The unfaithful spouse must recognize the minimum time taken to recover can be as long as the affair lasted.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Clinton, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage and Family Counseling*, 37.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 234.

Counseling Stages and Strategies

Pastors can be of tremendous help to couples who are in distressed marriages. Helping these couples can be seen as a part of the pastoral counseling aspect of ministry. Since pastors are involved in so many other duties in ministry, pastoral counseling is a “time-limited relationship.” This program will be sharing principles from Benner’s “Strategic Pastoral Counseling Model,”¹⁶¹ and Hawkins’ “Pastoral Assessment Model and Counseling Scenario.”¹⁶²

The counseling session will be limited to five sessions with a maximum time of 45-60 minutes. The time limit guidelines can help guard against “clinging”¹⁶³ clients. The focus will be on only one problem at a time. If another problem needs to be addressed, another counseling session appointment will have to be made. Each session will have a clear focus, and each session builds on the previous ones in contributing to accomplish the overall goal. The sessions will be spiritually focused. The concept of spirituality is grounded in the existence of God as Spirit and his loving act of having created us in his image for intimate relationship with him.¹⁶⁴

The strategy that will be used throughout the sessions is “Faith working through love from conviction.” The following assumptions can guide each session as the pastor looks for areas to build faith, to build the desire for the couple to work, to help build the couple’s love for God and each other, and to help increase conviction.

¹⁶¹ Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*.

¹⁶² Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Pastoral Counseling Scenario: Parts 1-4* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2008).

¹⁶³ Clyde M. Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960 (1979), 35.

¹⁶⁴ Benner, 63.

Annotated Assumptions

- God is already active in the counselee.¹⁶⁵ The pastor must actively be looking for clues of this activity.
- The counselee is not the problem, the problem is.¹⁶⁶ The pastor should be focusing on resolving the problem at hand.
- Counselees have resources and strengths to resolve complaints.¹⁶⁷ The pastor should be looking for available resources and strengths in the counselee's life to help resolve problem.
- The pastor's job is to identify and amplify change. A small change is all that is necessary because a change in one part of the system can affect change in another.¹⁶⁸
- Counselee's strengths will be amplified by helping them live around their strengths instead of just forbidding them to do bad things.¹⁶⁹

Encounter Stage

The encounter stage includes the initial contact with the couple. Pastors must show empathy, respect, and authenticity in this stage. According to Benner, empathy is a posture of openness to the experience of another person, respect involves valuing the

¹⁶⁵ Worthington, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track*, 69.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Hawkins, 3.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁹ George Faller, "Positive Psychology: A Paradigm Shift," *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 36, no. 1 (March, 2001): 19.

person as made in the image of God, and authenticity is a state of being real.¹⁷⁰ These three characteristics will help in building the counseling relationship.

It is advisable for pastors to have an intake package which should include a list of ethical guidelines. A sample is below:

Ethical Guidelines

- Pastor will not counsel with opposite sex (outside of own family) behind closed doors (Rom 13:14).
- Pastor will not share privileged information [unless there is impending harm to the care-seeker or someone else] (Prov. 25:2).
- Pastor will not intentionally lead the care-seeker to believe anything that is not altogether the truth (2 Cor 4:2).
- Pastor will ensure that the person being counseled understands that there may be limitations to the counseling relationship which may mean that the pastor may have to speak with others in regards to specific activities such as suspected criminal activity or death threats.¹⁷¹
- Pastor will continually counsel the law of forgiveness as Jesus Christ spoke about in Matthew 18:22.
- Pastor will ensure that if any given situation comes up that the pastor is not able to properly deal with, the pastor will quickly seek additional help or refer the person to someone with more experience in the matter.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling*, 75.

¹⁷¹ Kollar, *Solution Focused Pastoral Counseling*, 99.

¹⁷² Ibid., 96.

- The Care-seeker will not be neglected or ignored. Prompt response will be given in a reasonable amount of time to inquiries or requests for help.

Worthington also suggest that the intake package should include the following questions below so that the pastor can gain valuable insights about the marriage.

1. Have you ever been to counseling as a result of problems with this relationship prior to today? (Circle: Yes or No) If so, what was the outcome of that counseling?
2. Have either you or your partner been in individual counseling before? (Circle: Yes or No) If so, give a brief summary.
3. Do either you or your partner drink alcohol to intoxication or take drugs to intoxication? (Circle: Yes or No) If yes for either, who, how often and what drugs (or alcohol)?
4. Have either you or your partner struck, physically restrained, used violence against or injured the other person within the last three years? (Circle: Yes or No) If yes for either, who, how often and what happened?
5. Have either of you threatened to separate or divorce as a result of the current marital problems? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, who?
6. Have either you or your partner consulted a lawyer about divorce? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, who?
7. Do you perceive that either you or your partner has withdrawn from the marriage? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, which of you has withdrawn?
8. How frequently have you had sexual relations during the last month? ____times
9. How enjoyable is your sexual relationship? (Circle one)

Terrible	More unpleasant than pleasant	Not pleasant not unpleasant	More pleasant than unpleasant	Great
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10. How satisfied are you with the frequency of your sexual relations? (Circle one)

Way too often to suit me	A bit too often to suit me	About right	A bit too seldom to suit me	Way too seldom to suit me
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11. What is your current level of stress? (Circle one)

Extremely high	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low	Extremely low
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12. To what degree do you have family or friends that support you as a couple?
(Circle one) Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low
Very low Extremely low

13. To what degree do the two of you share a similar basic worldview?
(Circle one) Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low
Very low Extremely low¹⁷³

The first session is more of an assessment session. The pastor must gather as much information as possible through actively listening and the information from the intake forms. Pastor should allow both partners to speak from their perspective of the problem description while trying to prevent the couple from interrupting each other.

In the first session, the pastor must assess the twelve enrichment areas to determine where the issues lie. The pastor should allow the couple to agree on one the twelve areas that need intervention. That area will be explored and addressed in the engagement stage. Sometimes a spouse may find it difficult to narrow down one area or believe five sessions would not be enough. The pastor can reassure spouse by saying,

You might be right, [name]. You may need more help than I can give you. But we won't know that until we use the full five sessions. However, on the other hand, you may be quite surprised by how much help you can get once we are able to focus on one particular aspect of your life. I know it seems that are all equally important, but perhaps you should take some time to reflect prayerfully on them. You don't need to decide today. We can end now and finish this first session next week at the same time, if that would give you a chance to think about what is most important for you right now.¹⁷⁴

It is also in this stage that the pastor will start to help the couple see the need for conviction. Conviction by the Holy Spirit will drive the couple to want to work on their marriage. The pastor can ask the following questions: Do you want God's blessings on

¹⁷³ Worthington, 88.

¹⁷⁴ Benner, 87.

your marriage? Is it your desire to be Christ-like? Are you willing to be honest with God (Get Honest with God exercise) as He helps you through this difficult time?

The first session can also be used to observe the couples' communication patterns and conflict resolution skills. Worthington suggests giving the couples five minutes to discuss an issue they usually disagree on. The conversation should be recorded and reviewed later while answering the following questions:

What Couples Say

1. Does each partner seem to understand what the other is saying? If they were asked to repeat the other person's main arguments, do you think each partner could do so with fidelity? (Cue: Understand)
2. Do partners devalue each other? If so, how often and how do they devalue each other? (Cue: How Devalue)
3. To what degree is each person leveling with the partner (that is, sharing important information, feelings, thoughts)? To what degree does each partner seem to be editing information helpfully? (For example, are partners able to control expression of hurtful words and actions?) Unhelpfully? (For example, are partners clamming up or not passing along important information?) (Cue: Level-Edit)
4. Do partners seem bitter and unforgiving? (Cue: Unforgiving)

How Couples Say It

1. To what degree do the couples remain calm, especially when they get involved in a disagreement? (Cue: Calm)
2. Do couples make any attempts to regulate their negative emotion? That is, do one or both partners attempt to lighten the mood when it gets heavy or prevent the negative emotion from escalating? Do they have what John Gottman calls self-soothing strategies? (Cue: Regulate)
3. To what degree do partners listen to each other? Is misunderstanding evident? Do they give verbal or nonverbal signals that communicate that they are not listening? (Cue: Listening)
4. To what degree do partners spend time defining the problem versus trying to solve the problem? (Cue: Problem/Solution)
5. How do the partners' problem-solving styles complement or oppose each other? Is one person primarily emotional and the other primarily rational? Can the couple's problem-solving styles work together easily? (Cue: Styles)

6. To what degree is each person able to express his or her emotions nondestructively? (Cue: Emotional Expression)
7. Who does most of the talking? Who commands the floor? Who exerts the most power? Does one person have veto power? (Cue: Talk-Time)
8. Do partners have patterns of communication that make it hard to resolve differences? For example, does one partner (or both) interrupt? Filibuster? Communicate dogmatically? Refuse to consider other points of view? (Cue: Patterns)
9. Do couples devalue each other by looks, gestures, interruptions and other styles of communication? (Cue: Looks)

What Effects Couples Have on Each Other

1. To what degree do partners stake out incompatible positions? Attempt to see behind their positions to the interests of the other person? (Cue: Positions or Interests)
2. To what degree do partners seem committed to winning the argument because their egos are on the line? (Cue: Ego Involvement)
3. To what degree do partners seem to be in a power struggle with each other? Does the argument seem more related to a struggle over who has the say regardless of the problem, or does the struggle seem to be localized to the content of the problem? (Cue: Power Struggle)
4. To what degree do partners devalue each other? (Cue: Degree of Devaluing)¹⁷⁵

It is also in the first session that the pastor should make a prognosis. Worthington

suggests the prognosis to be based on the following:

The presence of any of these criteria indicate low likelihood of success. Presence of more than one criterion indicates extremely poor likelihood of success:

- ☐ severe psychopathology for either individual
- ☐ alcohol or drug abuse for either individual
- ☐ evidence of violence by either or each partner
- ☐ couples using coercion and threats of divorce
- ☐ either partner having consulted a lawyer about divorce
- ☐ either partner habitually withdrawn from the marriage
- ☐ either partner strongly committed ahead of time to a conception of counseling that stresses understanding of motives and insight as the solution for problems rather than active behavior as the solution

¹⁷⁵ Worthington, 88.

Presence of the following factors indicates good likelihood of success. The absence of a factor hurts likelihood of success but does not necessarily indicate a prognosis for failure.

Observable from Couple Interactions

- ☐ less dissatisfaction and distress rather than more
- ☐ ratio of positive to negative interactions that is 5:1 or higher
- ☐ emotional commitment to the specific marriage
- ☐ both partners' perceived-actual emotional intimacy relatively close to ideal
- ☐ both partners' profession that they want to resolve their problems and want practical suggestions
- ☐ couples still emotionally engaged with each other, even if they argue frequently and/or heatedly
- ☐ couples reporting that they are still having relatively frequent sexual relations, especially if those relations are usually enjoyable for both partners

Observable from Characteristics of Couple

- ☐ couple has good reasons for staying together (for example, long history together, children in the home, potential for being hurt in reputation or finances by divorce)
- ☐ younger couples rather than long-married couples
- ☐ fewer rather than more life stressors
- ☐ presence of a nonintrusive, noncontrolling social support system for both spouses

Partner Similarities

- ☐ both partners express high value of marriage
- ☐ partners agree in general on their worldview, and that worldview is generally consonant with the counselor's worldview
- ☐ couples are both committed Christians
- ☐ couples are not offended by the counselor's Christianity
- ☐ both partners trust counseling and counselor¹⁷⁶

Pastor should share the prognosis with the couples. However, since "Hope Conquers Distress," pastors are still encouraged to inject hope. It is in the hopeless situations that God can demonstrate His power.

As time for first session is coming to a close, Narramore suggests the pastor may say, "For the next few minutes let's discuss..." The pastor may need to interrupt an

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 93

interview by saying, “Our time has gone by so fast. We’ll have to close now. Shall we continue our discussion next week?”¹⁷⁷

Engagement Stage

It is in the engagement stage (Sessions 2-4) where most of the counseling will be done. These sessions can be weekly or every two weeks. The pastor will explore feelings, thoughts and behaviors. It is in this stage that the pastor will attempt to build new patterns of acting, thinking and feeling towards each other and towards God.¹⁷⁸

The pastor should listen empathically to the feelings of each partner. It is advisable not to prejudge feelings but encourage facing and accepting those feelings that are acceptable.¹⁷⁹

The pastor should give intervention assignments based on targeted area. Assessments that should be made throughout the sessions. Kollar’s tracks can be used throughout counseling sessions to amplify change. In the “Recent Change”¹⁸⁰ track, a pastor may ask, “What have you noticed that have been better for the past few days?” If something is better, the pastor can clarify the change by asking, “How do you account for this [change]? Are these the types of changes you would like to continue to have happened?”

¹⁷⁷ Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling*, 34.

¹⁷⁸ Worthington, 40.

¹⁷⁹ Benner, 91.

¹⁸⁰ Worthington, loc., 1783.

In the “Future Focus”¹⁸¹ track, a pastor may ask, “If right now you had what you wanted, how would you imagine that your life would be different.” This is similar to the “Miracle Question” discussed earlier.

In the “Managing”¹⁸² track, a pastor may ask, “What are you doing to manage when things are going so bad? What would tell you things are getting a little better?” Any exception to the problem can be the change needed to help the spouse seeking help.

The pastor is encouraged to take notes. This will be helpful when the pastor writes the assessment reports. Worthington suggests one report in session two and one report at the session prior to the final session. The first report should include personal data, presenting complaints, relationship history, relationship strengths, relationship weaknesses, recommended treatment goals and overall summation.¹⁸³ The last report assesses the current marital status. The report should describe the progress made, suggest ways for couples to continue working on their goals and include the pastor’s feelings about working with the couple in counseling.¹⁸⁴

Disengagement Stage

The disengagement stage should be session five. The pastor should evaluate the progress. A break of several weeks is recommended before the final session so as to give couples time to apply some of the strategies.¹⁸⁵ Couples should also use this time to build their faith and love for God and each other.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 1832.

¹⁸² Ibid., 1959.

¹⁸³ Worthington, 94.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Benner, 97.

It is in this stage, that any necessary referrals can be made. Referrals can be made for financial, legal, medical or psychological reasons. Referrals can be to physicians (including psychiatrists) and psychologists. The family doctor should be the first point of contact if there are signs of significant weight loss or gain, disruptions in normal sleep pattern, medical symptoms or sexual related issues.¹⁸⁶

Referrals should also be made for psychiatric illnesses such as delusions (false beliefs held despite contrary evidence) or hallucinations (hearing voices when they are not present). In cases of serious depression (more than one month and involving considerable alteration of behavior) or displays of manic behavior (elevated mood that manifests itself in inappropriate euphoria and exuberance, and inflated sense of well-being, increased motor behavior and energy level that may be exhibited in boisterous and pressured speech, hyperactivity, flight of ideas, or impulsive and irrational behavior). These are some of the main symptoms of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and paranoid disorder.¹⁸⁷

Referrals should be made for drug and alcohol abuse. Referrals can also be made to marital and family therapists. In this study, 6 (35%) of the research participants were not sure when a referral should be made. The pastor should check in with couple after referral is made.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 98.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 100.

CHAPTER 4 PROCEDURE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Awareness Campaign

The first assignment after demonstration project proposal approval was to raise awareness of the state of marriages in churches. This task was the responsibility the researcher and the site team members. The first awareness meeting was set for Sat Dec 10, 2016. Three hundred flyers were created and given out to local churches and pastors.¹⁸⁸

The researcher had the opportunity to go on Minister Glen's show on Nov 17, December 2, 2016 and Feb 16, 2017 to raise awareness. The show was streamed live¹⁸⁹ so many more potential pastors were reached. The awareness campaign was successful and prepared the way for the first meeting. The first meeting on Dec 10th continued to raise awareness and sought out willing participants for the project.

Research Methodology

This demonstration project utilized action research, "a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives."¹⁹⁰ The dissertation represents the scholarly works that are used to

¹⁸⁸ For copy of flyer, see Appendix D.

¹⁸⁹ *FB Live*, 88.9 FM in New York and www.DJGlenMusic.com.

¹⁹⁰ Ernest T Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 1.

make knowledge claims that are transferrable and goes beyond the immediate setting.¹⁹¹

Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program was designed to help equip pastors with knowledge and the skills needed to help couples who are in distress.

The conversation between action research in the DMin program versus research in the PhD program must be understood. Defense of action research used in the DMin program is often needed because it is not mainstream research in universities. Some have simplified the distinction between PhD and DMin by saying the former is attempting to “answer a question” and the latter is attempting to “solve a problem.” Since solving problems requires data, this project used quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect the data.

Quantitative research is a method used to gather data when a researcher wants to know how many times or how often something happens. Quantitative data in this project came from four questionnaires that asked the pastors to choose responses describing their self-reported changes in their knowledge and skills and also in their confidence and competency resulting from the two training workshops. Qualitative research is a method used when a researcher wants to understand why something happens. Qualitative data in this project came from the open text boxes in the post questionnaires, asking the pastors to briefly describe any changes to their pre- workshop questionnaires.

Instruments and Research Design

The questionnaires used to acquire the data were also very important. Primary data came from pre- and post- training questionnaires. Pre-training questionnaires were

¹⁹¹ Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 6.

given at the Awareness Seminar held in Dec 10, 2016 and also before the first Workshop held April 1, 2017. Post- training questionnaires were given directly following the second workshop on April 8, 2017. Subsequently, 1, 3, and 6-month questionnaires were given out. Pre- and Post-questionnaires were given out in paper format. 1, 3, and 6-month post questionnaires were given in online format using Google Forms.

This research study was based on a three phase One Group Pretest-Posttest Design, also known as “pre-experimental” or “pre-experimental design.” In phase one, the pre-experimental observations were explored in the pre-test questionnaire. In phase two, the experimental treatment (Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program) included an initial post training questionnaire. Phase three concluded with the one, three and six-month questionnaires, to evaluate short-term and long-term effectiveness of the training as reported by the participants.

Collection of Data

The collection of data occurred over a period of seven to nine months, beginning from the awareness seminar. The quantitative data collected was analyzed and evaluated to gauge the effects of the training on the pastors. The qualitative data collected was used to see what, if any, changes were produced as a result of the training. Preliminary results show that there were increased levels of both “competence or effectiveness” and “confidence of the pastor.” Detailed analysis of data will be given in the chapter five. Data validity is an important aspect in data analysis.

Data Validity

There are two types of data validity, internal and external. Internal validity refers to the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from data. External validity refers to how well these inferences are transferable to another context. Regardless of how trustworthy or

transferable the research is, some agree that the local knowledge generated from action research can produce change within the practice setting but disagree on its transferability outside the setting as public knowledge. Others suggest that action research is “practical inquiry” that focuses on the “improvement of practice.” Herr and Anderson suggest that participatory action researchers can help to bring both insider and outsider perspectives into the research, and thus solve the dualistic issues that arise from the formal/practical knowledge debate.¹⁹² The feedback from the participants used in this project was helpful to the outcome.

Herr and Anderson offer five validity criteria that are helpful to the goals of action research. Outcome validity speaks of the extent to which actions occur that brings about a resolution to the problem under study. Process validity asks “to what extent problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system.” Democratic validity speaks of “the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation.” Catalytic validity is “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants towards reality in order to transform it.” Dialogic validity is the monitoring of the research through “the process of peer review to be disseminated through academic journals.”¹⁹³ These five validity criteria guided this research project.

In this research, the validity of group changes in the participants’ competency and confidence was calculated using a paired sample Two Tailed T-Test, computed at 95%.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 67-69.

This test was used because of the uncertainty as to whether the direction of the change being measured would be negative or positive.

Research Participants

The participants in this research study were selected after the awareness seminar. Selection criteria for pastors were based on availability and commitment level to the upcoming training workshops. Participants were presented a clear vision of the direction and intentions of the project. This enabled participants to know and understand the long-term vision, the operational plans to accomplish the vision, and the action plans which give specific steps to accomplish each activity in the project. Stringer calls this the vision statement of the project.¹⁹⁴ The vision statement was also important to the site-team members as the process went along.

Participants were of different ages and marital status. Of the 18 participants, 4 were ages 61 and over, 9 were ages 46-60, 3 were ages 36-45, and 2 were 26-35. The marital status was as follows; 15 were married, 2 were divorced and 1 was single. When asked in question 3, “Pastors, if equipped, can help turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church,” 12 participants agreed and 4 participants strongly agreed to this question.¹⁹⁵ These participants were very open to what the workshops would have to offer. Participants were also of different denominational backgrounds: Pentecostal, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, and Non-Denominational.

All participants were given informed consent information at the beginning of the pre-workshop questionnaire. Participants were reminded that their participation in this

¹⁹⁴ Stringer, *Action Research*, 193-195.

¹⁹⁵ Data taken from pre-training workshop questionnaire.

research study was completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. Participants were reminded that their candid feedback will be used for the development of the Marriage Enrichment Training Program. All participants agreed to this.

CHAPTER 5 DATA EVALUATION FROM THE TRAINING

Pre-Training and Initial Post Training Data Evaluation

The pre-training data was very helpful in determining the participant's awareness on the state of Christian marriages in the church and in determining their confidence and competence or effectiveness levels when dealing with couples, whose marriages are in distress. Questions that are specific to pastors' awareness, confidence, and effectiveness will be addressed. The initial post-training data was used to gauge any changes immediately after the training.

When participants were asked in question 2, "How aware are you about marriages that are in distress in your church?"¹⁹⁶ 9 participants responded, "Very Aware," 6 participants responded, "Aware," and 3 participants responded, "Somewhat Aware." According to the data collected, around 85% of the participants were either aware or very aware that Christian marriages were in distress with in their respective churches.

In the initial post-training data, 14 participants responded, "Very Aware," and participants responded, "Aware." This indicated that 100% of the participants became fully aware of the state of marriages in churches today. One participant noted, "The information received shed more light on the state of marriages within the church." Another noted that the workshops were, "An eye opener to how many Christians are not

¹⁹⁶ For Sample Questionnaire, see Appendix E.

within the covenant.” This new awareness was a motivation factor for many of the pastors.

In the next question, 3, “Pastors, if equipped, can help turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church,” 4 responded, “Strongly Agreed,” 12 responded, “Agreed,” 1 responded, “Neither Agree or Disagree” and 1 responded, “Strongly Disagree.”

In the initial post-training data, 12 participants responded, “Strongly Agreed,” 2 responded, “Agreed,” and 4 responded, “Strongly Disagree.” The knowledge gained from the workshops shifted some participants’ view of pastors who are equipped. One participant expressed, “I believe that if I were more equipped, I would have been able to prevent a divorce.” Another participant noted, “Training and understanding God’s desire for marriage makes the difference” in helping to turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church.

When participants were asked in question 4 if, “The pastoral counseling role in your ministry is viewed as important,” 11 responded, “Very Important,” 6 responded, “Important,” and 1 responded, “Somewhat Important.” This question was seeking to understand the participants’ position of the counseling role of pastors in ministry.

In the post-training data, all 18 (100%) participants responded, “Very Important.” This is a huge increase from the 11 (61%) who responded, “Very Important,” in the pre-training. The way the workshop was presented helped the participants to see the importance of the pastoral counselor in ministry. One participant noted, “The need [for pastors] to find root causes and help with restoration” can be accomplished through the pastoral counseling ministry of the church. Another participant noted, “Properly trained

pastors can be able to help couples, as opposed to secular counselors.” A closer look at the counseling role in ministry can help pastor to become more effective in helping couples who are in distress.

Participants were then asked in question 5, “Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages.” 1 participant responded, “Not Very Effective,” 7 responded, “Somewhat Effective,” 5 responded, “Effective,” and 5 responded, “Very Effective.” This question was seeking to gauge what possible effects the “Hope Conquers” program may or may not have on the participants. Since the participants’ perception of effectiveness can be easily molded by negative or positive outcomes when dealing with distressed couples, it is reasonable to conclude that the participants’ effectiveness levels is directly related to the competency levels.

In the initial post-training data, 2 participants responded, “Somewhat Effective,” 6 responded, “Effective,” 7 responded, “Very Effective,” and 3 responded, “Extremely Effective.” A reduction of participants from 7 (41%) to 2 (11%), who answered “Somewhat Effect,” and an addition of 3 (17%) participants who responded “Extremely Effective,” was an initial indication that the workshop was effective in increasing effectiveness. Further analysis of this question will be done in the hypothesis testing section of this chapter.

Participants’ follow up responses also support these initial findings as one participant noted, “My knowledge has increased greatly.” Another said, “The informative provided in the training helped me to be more confident if I have to work with distress couples.” Another said, their level of effectiveness increased because, “I received more information on how to deal with this issue” of distressed couples. Another said, “The

importance of having the correct tools to help when a marriage is in distress,” helped to increase effectiveness.

When asked in question 8, “How often do you work with a couple in distress? (serious conflict- possibly divorce),” 14 participants responded, “A few times a year,” 2 responded, “About once per month,” and 2 responded, “Once a week.” The initial post-training data was similar, but one participant noted that the times spent with these couples presents “unpredictable challenges you may encounter when dealing with Christian couples.”

Question 9 asked about the participants’ personal challenges while working with couples in distress. 10 participants responded, “I sometimes find it hard to combine my Biblical commitment to marriage and compassion for hurting people.” The initial post-training responses were 11 participants.

12 responded to the next personal challenge, “I am often not sure how to understand the dynamics of how the relationship became a distress marriage.” The initial post-training responses were the same.

The next challenge, “I sometimes feel uneasy about potential conflicts being both their pastor and counselor,” yielded 10 responses. The initial post-training responses were 11 of the participants. One participant said, “Training has given me the reassurance that eliminates feelings of conflict.”

8 participants responded to the next challenge, “I sometimes feel like my own marriage is not a strong example of a healthy relationship.” The initial post-training responses were the same. A discussion on this question in the workshop helped some

pastors to have a better understanding that even if their marriage was not a strong example, it was still their responsibility to help couples in distressed marriages.

The next challenge, “I have some uncertainty about how being divorced affects how a person/couple is viewed in my church,” yielded 10 responses. The initial post-training responses were 9 of the participants. The workshop provided adequate information on how divorce affects individuals, even in the church.

10 participants responded to the next challenge, “I find it difficult to remain emotionally neutral when working with a couple in distress.” The initial post-training responses were 8 of the participants. The counseling strategies that were presented in the workshops helped participants to understand how to demonstrate “fit” when counseling. This is experienced when the pastor is able to engage with the counselee in a way that shows that he or she identifies with and understands the counselee’s concerns.¹⁹⁷ One participant noted that the workshop helped in providing a strategy for understanding couples better in their situation, through listening.

The last challenge, “I am not always confident I know if divorce is preventable,” yielded 11 responses. The initial post-training responses were 9 of the participants. This may be due to the workshop as one participant said, “I learned that there is always HOPE and divorce is not an option.”

The participants were then asked in question 10, to rate their current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages. 8 responded, “Somewhat Confident,” 9 responded, “Confident,” and 1 responded, “Very Confident.”

¹⁹⁷ Kollar, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling*.

In the initial post-training data, 0 responded, “Somewhat Confident,” 5 responded, “Confident,” 11 responded, “Very Confident,” and 2 responded, “Extremely Confident.” There was a drastic decrease from 8 (44%) to 0 of those who responded, “Somewhat Confident,” and an addition of 2 (11%) participants who responded, “Extremely Confident.” One participant said, “[I] learned many new things from the program.” Another noted, “[I] gained a better grasp of problem solving.” Another participant noted, “The information received at the training helped build my confidence and I feel equip[ped] to help troubled marriages.” This question will also be further analyzed in the hypothesis testing section, later in this chapter.

Participants were asked in question 11 to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about their counseling experiences with distressed marriages (response range was “Strongly Disagree” to Strongly Agree”). Of the results from the first statement, “I feel God uses me to make a real difference with couples in distressed marriages,” 1 responded, “Undecided,” 10 responded, “Agreed,” and 7 responded, “Strongly Agreed.” In the initial post-training responses, 8 participants, “Agreed,” and 12 “Strongly agreed.” The workshop may have helped shift the one undecided participant.

Results from the next statement, “I gladly make time when requested,” showed, 9 participants, “Agreed,” and 9 participants, “Strongly Agreed.” In the initial post-training data, 1 participant was “Undecided,” 9 participants, “Agreed,” and 8 participants, “Strongly Agreed.”

Results from the next statement, “I would rather refer couples to a marriage counselor than see them myself,” showed that 7 participants “Disagreed,” 3 participants

“Undecided,” 4 participants “Agreed,” and 4 participants “Strongly Agreed.” In the initial post-training data, 7 participants responded, “Disagreed,” 3 responded, “Undecided,” 4 responded, “Agreed,” and 3 responded, “Strongly Agreed.”

Results from the next statement, “I wish I was better equipped to better help distressed marriages,” showed that 1 participant “Disagreed,” 2 participants “Undecided,” 7 participants “Agreed,” and 8 participants “Strongly Agreed.” In the post-training data, 3 participants responded, “Disagreed,” 1 responded, “Undecided,” 9 responded, “Agreed,” and 6 responded, “Strongly Agreed.”

Results from the last statement, “I am usually optimistic about the outcome for distressed marriages,” showed that 9 participants responded, “Agreed,” and 9 participants responded, “Strongly Agreed.” In the initial post-training, 1 participant responded, “Undecided,” 8 responded, “Agreed,” and 9 responded, “Strongly Agreed.” In this section, participants noted that the program helped to equip them to be better pastoral counselors.

From question 12, when participants were asked to rate to what degree the following issues impact their ability as a pastor to work with distressed marriages, 2 participants responded that “Overwhelmed with other pastoral duties,” “Makes it difficult,” 3 participants responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 12 participants responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the post-training data, 1 participant responded that “Overwhelmed with other pastoral duties,” “Makes it difficult,” 5 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 11 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

On the next issue of “Getting discouraged with poor outcomes,” 11 participants responded that this issue, “Does not affect my ability at all,” 5 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 2 responded, “Makes it extremely difficult.”

In the initial post-training data, 14 responded that this issue, “Does not affect my ability at all,” and 4 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult.”

On the next issue of “No specialized training for counseling distress marriages” 2 responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 2 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 9 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 5 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the initial post-training data, 1 participant responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 3 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 11 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 10 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

On the next issue of “Couples waiting until it’s too late to come in,” 2 participants responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 2 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 9 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 4 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the initial post-training data, 2 participants responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 3 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 5 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 7 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.” The increase from 4 to 7 participants who responded that “It does not affect my ability” may be due to the training workshops. One participant said, “Knowing that there are resources available (as given to us) makes counseling less challenging to us.”

On the next issue of “Not having a clear plan of where to start and where to go with these couples,” 3 responded, “Makes it very difficult,” 11 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 3 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the initial post-training data, 1 responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 6 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 5 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 5 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

The results for Question number 13, “Based on your experience with couples in your church, please check the most frequent reasons you hear are the reasons for distress in their marriage” are shown in Table 3 below. N represents number of participants.

Reasons	Participants' Responses N (%)	
	Pre	Post
How my spouse handles money	16 (90%)	11 (61%)
Growing apart	13 (72%)	10 (56%)
Not enough attention	12 (67%)	11 (61%)
Not being able to talk together	13 (72%)	15 (83%)
My spouse's friends	8 (44%)	7 (39%)
My spouse's leisure activities	10 (56%)	6 (33%)
In-law problems	10 (56%)	10 (57%)
My spouse's personal habits	12 (67%)	10 (57%)
How we divide household responsibilities	9 (50%)	8 (44%)
Religious differences	8 (44%)	8 (44%)
Alcohol or drug problems	7 (39%)	8 (44%)
Personal problems of my spouse	11 (61%)	8 (44%)
Infidelity	9 (50%)	11 (61%)
My spouse works too many hours	8 (44%)	8 (44%)
Sexual problems	10 (56%)	13 (72%)
How we divide child care responsibilities	8 (44%)	8 (44%)
Physical violence	7 (39%)	11 (61%)
Differences in our tastes and preferences	5 (28%)	6 (33%)
Conflicts over raising our stepchildren	6 (33%)	8 (44%)
Conflicts over raising our own children	5 (28%)	4 (22%)

Table 3: Most Frequent Reasons for Distress in Marriages Responses

Question 13 gave great insights on the pastor's experience and exposure to the different reasons for distress in marriages.

Month One and Month Three - Post Training Data Analysis

The one-month and three-month post training data were very helpful in determining the participant's confidence and competency or effectiveness levels when dealing with couples, whose marriages are in distress. The same questions from the pre-training and initial post training data are used in this section for analysis.

One month later, when participants were asked in question 2, "How aware are you about marriages that are in distress in your church?" 16 participants responded, "Very Aware," and 2 participants responded, "Aware." One participant said, "I am now more aware of the condition of marriages in distress." Another participant reflected, "I began to see things from God's prospective, God's Word, and God's desire." Another responded, "Participating [in the workshops] gave insights and new interest [for me wanting] to learn and help [couples]."

In the three-month post-training data for question 2, 14 participants responded, "Very Aware," and 4 participants responded, "Aware." One participant said, "This training has given a wide variety to "look for" and "listen to" before and during counseling sessions. Another noted, "I wasn't aware that marriage in the church was so distressing and frustrated."

In the one-month post training data for question 3, "Pastors, if equipped, can help turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church," 6 responded, "Strongly Agreed," 6 responded, "Agreed," 1 responded, "Neither Agreed or Disagreed" and 5 responded, "Strongly Disagreed."

In the three-month post-training data, 4 responded, "Strongly agreed," 4 responded, "Agreed," 10 responded, "Strongly disagree." One participant who disagreed pointed out, "Each case is unique. The Lord does not agree with unequally yoked

marriages. In certain cases, some may not be salvageable.” Another participant who strongly agreed noted, “We can tackle the enemy because we now have strategies” as a result of the workshops.

In the one-month post training, when asked in question 4 if “The pastoral counseling role in your ministry is viewed as important,” 13 responded, “Very important,” 4 responded “Important” and 1 responded, “Somewhat important.” One participant pointed out, “From the pre-training my way of thinking has changed in the way that I see couples. Sometimes I take it lightly but after the training I realized that when people ask for help or mention a little issue I need to take note.” Another participant noted, “Counseling in any form, pertaining to marriages, and especially couples are very essential and benefits both.”

In the three-month post-training data for question 4, 16 participants responded, “Very Important,” 1 responded “Important” and 1 responded, “Somewhat Important.” One participant noted, “Gained personal conviction that, with hope and an open mind, marriages seemingly with distress after truthful discussion may be turned around.” Another participant noted that “marriage counseling is a priority now.”

In the one-month post-training, when asked in question 5, “Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages,” 1 responded, “Not Very Effective,” 2 responded, “Somewhat Effective,” 6 responded, “Effective,” 8 responded, “Very Effective,” and 1 responded, “Extremely Effective.”

In the three-month post-training data for question 5, 3 responded, “Somewhat Effective,” 6 responded, “Effective,” 7 responded, “Very Effective,” and 2 responded, “Extremely Effective.” This shows that the workshop feelings of effectiveness. One

participant noted, “Since the training I am more effective using the strategies I have learned.” Another said, “I now even more intentionally use the training tools to enhance the work.”

In the one-month post training, when asked in question 6 about the participants’ personal challenges while working with couples in distress, 5 participants responded, “I sometimes find it hard to combine my biblical commitment to marriage and compassion for hurting people.” The three-month post-training data responses were the same.

5 participants responded, “I am often not sure how to understand the dynamics of how the relationship became a distress marriage.” In the three-month post-training data, 3 participants responded.

1 participant responded, “I sometimes feel uneasy about potential conflicts being both their pastor and counselor. The three-month post-training data responses were 2 of the participants. This could be due to the knowledge gained from the workshops since one participant said, “Training has given me the reassurance that eliminates feelings of conflict.”

1 participant responded, “I sometimes feel like my own marriage is not a strong example of a healthy relationship.” The three-month post-training data responses were 2 of the participants. This change was due to the fact that some pastors had a better understanding that even if their marriage was not a strong example, it was still their responsibility to help couples in distressed marriages.

3 participants responded, “I have some uncertainty about how being divorced affects how a person/couple is viewed in my church.” The three-month post-training data

response was 1 of the participants. The workshop provided adequate information on how divorce affects individuals, even in the church.

4 participants responded, “I find it difficult to remain emotionally neutral when working with a couple in distress.” The three-month post-training data response was 7 of the participants. The counseling strategies that were presented in the workshops helped participants to understand how to listen attentively when counseling. One participant noted, “The workshop helped in providing a strategy for understanding couples better in their situation, through listening.”

8 participants responded, “I am not always confident I know if divorce is preventable.” The three-month post-training data responses were 5 of the participants. This may be due to the workshop as one participant said, “I learned that there is always HOPE and divorce is not an option.”

In the one-month post training, when asked in question 7 to rate their current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages, 2 participants responded, “Somewhat Confident,” 4 responded, “Confident,” 10 responded, “Very Confident,” and 2 responded, “Extremely Confident.”

In the three-month post-training data, 2 responded, “Somewhat confident,” responded, “Confident,” 9 responded, “Very confident,” and 3 responded, “Extremely Confident.” There was an increase from 2 (11%) to 3 (17%) participants who responded, “Extremely confident.” One participant noted, “Learned many new things from the program.” Another noted, “Gained a better grasp of problem solving.” Another participant noted, “The information received at the training helped build my confidence and I feel equip[ped] to help troubled marriages.”

Participants were asked in question 8 to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about their counseling experiences with distressed marriages (responses ranged from “Strongly Disagreed” to “Strongly Agreed”). Results from the first statement, “I feel God uses me to make a real difference with couples in distressed marriages,” showed that 1 participant responded, “Undecided,” 7 responded, “Agreed,” and 8 responded, “Strongly Agreed.” In the three-month post-training data, 7 responded, “Agreed,” 7 responded, “Strongly Agreed,” and 1 participant each responded “Strongly Disagreed,” “Disagreed,” and “Undecided.”

Results from the next statement, “I gladly make time when requested,” showed that, 1 participant responded, “Disagreed,” 2 responded, “Undecided,” 6 responded, “Agreed,” and 7 responded “Strongly Agreed.” In the three-month post-training data, 7 participants responded, “Agreed,” 6 responded, “Strongly Agreed,” and 1 participant each responded “Strongly Disagreed,” “Disagreed,” and “Undecided.”

Results from the next statement, “I would rather refer couples to a marriage counselor than see them myself,” showed that 1 participant responded, “Strongly Disagreed,” 6 responded, “Disagreed,” 4 responded, “Undecided,” 2 responded, “Agreed,” and 3 responded, “Strongly Agreed.” In the three-month post-training data, 4 participants responded, “Strongly Disagreed,” 8 responded, “Disagreed,” 1 responded, “Undecided,” 4 responded, “Agreed,” and 1 responded, “Strongly Agreed.”

Results from the next statement, “I wish I was better equipped to better help distressed marriages,” showed that 1 participant responded, “Strongly Disagreed,” 4 responded, “Disagreed,” 2 responded, “Undecided,” 5 responded, “Agreed,” and 4 responded, “Strongly Agreed.” In the three-month post-training data, 2 participants

responded, “Strongly Disagreed,” 7 responded, “Disagreed,” 1 responded, “Undecided,” 6 responded “Agreed,” and 1 responded, “Strongly Agreed.”

Results from the last statement, “I am usually optimistic about the outcome for distressed marriages,” showed that 3 participants responded, “Disagreed,” 2 responded, “Undecided,” 7 responded, “Agreed,” and 5 responded, “Strongly Agreed.” In the three-month post-training data, 9 participants responded, “Agreed,” 5 responded, “Strongly Agreed,” and 1 participant each responded, “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagreed,” and “Undecided.” In this section, participants noted that the program helped to equip them to be better pastoral counselors.

Question 9, asked the participants to rate what degree the following issues impact their ability as a pastor to work with distressed marriages. The first issue, “Overwhelmed with other pastoral duties,” 6 participants responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 9 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the three-month post-training data, 1 participant responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 2 responded, “Makes it very difficult,” 7 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 8 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

On the next issue of “Getting discouraged with poor outcomes,” 5 participants responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 11 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the three-month post-training data, 1 participant responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 9 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 7 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

On the next issue of “No specialized training for counseling distress marriages” 1 responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 3 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 6 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 5 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the three-month post-training data, 1 participant responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 2 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 6 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 8 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

On the next issue of “Couples waiting until it’s too late to come in,” 3 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 7 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 8 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the three-month post-training data, 2 responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 2 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 9 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 5 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.” One participant said, “Knowing that there are resources available (as given to us) makes counseling less challenging to us.”

On the next issue of “Not having a clear plan of where to start and where to go with these couples,” 1 participant responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 5 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 9 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

In the three-month post-training data, 1 participant responded, “Makes it extremely difficult,” 1 responded, “Makes it difficult,” 5 responded, “Makes it somewhat difficult,” and 9 responded, “Does not affect my ability at all.”

The last question, 10, in the one-month post training questionnaire, “How equipped are you now, when dealing with couples whose marriage are in distress, as a result of completing the “Hope Conquers” training workshops?” was introduced to get a precise self-reported change, 1, 3, and 6 months after training. The scale was from 0 to

10, with 0 meaning not equipped and 10 meaning well equipped. 2 responded 5 on the scale, 1 responded, 6 on the scale, 4 responded, 7 on the scale, 6 responded, 8 on the scale, 3 responded 9 on the scale, and 2 responded 10 on the scale.

In the three-month post training data, 1 responded, 6 on the scale, 5 responded, 7 on the scale, 5 responded, 8 on the scale, 4 responded 9 on the scale, and 3 responded 10 on the scale.

The feedback from this question was interesting. One participant responded, “Because more first-hand information and resources was given I am more equipped to counsel with boldness.” Another responded, “I believe that the training that we received will not only equip us to minister to marriages that are in distress, but it has also given us the tools to recognize troubled marriages before they get to that point of no return!!!” Another responded, “Hope Conquers creates the possibilities for discussions with couples in distress, and gives information to open the door for restoration.” Another responded, “The work shop was very helpful, constructive and well planned.”

The feedback here also showed increased levels of confidence and competence. One participant noted, “The training has confirmed a lot of what I already do and it has also added some new areas of focus for conversation with the couples.” Another said, “I have learned strategies that has enable me to be more confident as a result I have become more effective in counselling couples who are in distress marriages.” Another participant said, “The training workshop has been beneficial. It has allowed me to become more aware of the issues that are involved in distress marriages and therefore it gives me the ability to prepare to answer possible questions as they pertain to problem solving.”

Month Six Post Training Data Analysis

The six-month post training questionnaire was designed to attain some additional information from the participants, while continuing to gauge any self-reported changes in competency and confidence levels. Questions, 2, 3, 4, and 8 were introduced to get additional information about participants' counseling skills and information on changes and suggestions in the "Hope Conquers" workshops. Questions 5-7 were used to gauge changes in effectiveness and confidence levels six months after workshops.

In question 2, participants were asked, "Prior to "Hope Conquers" workshops, what type of counseling were you trained to provide?" 11 (65%) responded, "Biblical Counseling," 5 (29%) responded, "Marriage Counseling," 2 (12%) responded, "Financial Counseling," 3 (17%) responded, "Pre-Marital Counseling," and 6 (35%) responded, "None."

The responses from this question seem to indicate that most pastors were more trained to provide biblical counseling than any other counseling. Biblical counseling generally uses the Bible to address the issues in the lives of individuals, couples, and families. Since the Bible teaches that our thoughts, motives, attitudes, words, and actions flow from the sinful selfishness of our hearts, pastors are generally equipped to perform this type of counseling. What was even more amazing is that only 5 (29%) responded to "Marriage Counseling." The "Hope Conquers," workshops were very helpful to these participants.

In question 3, participants were asked, "When do you think a referral should be made? 6 (35%) responded, "If I am not trained in a specific problem area (after 2 sessions)," 3 (18%) responded, "After I have attempted to help but no progress is made

(after 3 sessions),” 3 (18%) responded, “After a minimum of 5 sessions,” 0 (0%) responded, “No referral should be made,” 6 (31%) responded, “Not sure.”

0 responses to “No referral should be made” is a clear indication that all participants seem to believe that at some point a referral should be made. The responses also indicate that all participants seem to believe that every individual should at least be given a listening ear, even if the pastor is unable to help.

In question 4, participants were asked, “Have you ever been trained to use any of the following counseling theories?” 2 (13%) responded, “Acceptance Commitment Theory” 9 (60%) responded, “Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy” 4 (29%) responded, “Collaborative Couples Therapy,” 7 (47%) responded, “Conflict Resolution Therapy,” 3 (20%) responded, “Emotionally Focused,” 3 (20%) responded, “Attachment Theory,” 3 (20%) responded, “Solution-Focused Brief Therapy,” 1 (7%) responded, “None.”

The response to this question is a clear indication that pastors need to be exposed to more counseling theories in order to help couples. Hope Conquers Distress provided the participants some exposure to all the above counseling theories.

In the six-month post-training, when asked in question 5, “Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages,” 2 participants responded, “Somewhat Effective,” 8 responded, “Effective,” 7 responded, “Very effective,” and 1 responded, “Extremely effective.” This question will be analyzed further in the hypothesis section.

Participants noted that their level of effectiveness increased for various reasons. One participant noted, “Understanding conflict resolution helped me to make an impact in my counselling.” Another participant noted, “I have a clear plan as to how to approach

the counseling scenario. I understand how to approach couples from the encounter stage, the engagement stage, and the disengagement stage.” Another noted, “I now have the level of competence needed to make an intervention.”

In the six-month post training, when asked in question 6, to rate their current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages, 4 participants responded, “Confident,” 11 responded, “Very Confident,” and 2 responded, “Extremely Confident.” This question will also be analyzed further in the hypothesis section.

The results indicate an increase in confidence after the workshops as participants were very expressive in their responses to this question. One participant responded, “Before I attended the pre-training I used the Word of God and experience, but after the pre-training training I became aware of what to listen and look for as the problem and not just what is being said.” Another noted, “My confidence level has made me more positive of the outcome in couples that are in distress marriages.” Another noted, “The workshops have given me additional information that I can use to help distressed couples as well as increased my confidence in being a source of help to distressed couples.” Another noted, “I now have a greater knowledge base concerning marriage solution.”

In the six-month post training, when asked in question 7, “How equipped are you now when dealing with couples whose marriage are in distress, as a result of completing the “Hope Conquers” training workshops?” The scale was from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning not equipped and 10 meaning well equipped. 1 responded, 3 on the scale, 3 responded, 7 on the scale, 6 responded, 8 on the scale, 5 responded 9 on the scale, and 3 responded 10 on the scale.

Findings suggestion that participants believed that they were more equipped when dealing with distressed marriages. In the one and three months responses, 3 participants responded 6 or below on the scale. However, this number reduced to 1 participant in the six months questionnaire. 17 of the 18 participants were at a level 7 or above six months after the workshop.

The last question in the six-month post questionnaire, “Please describe any changes or suggestions you would like to see in the “Hope Conquers” workshops” will be discussed in “Suggested Changes” in Chapter 7.

Hypothesis Testing

The data received from the following two questions were used to test the hypotheses and answer the research question, “Would a training in a new marriage enrichment program called Hope Conquers Distress increase a pastor’s self-reported competency and confidence, and effectively inject hope into a couple whose marriage is in distress?”

Data from the first question, “Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages,” is shown below in the Table 4.

Answers	Pre-training Response	Post-Training Response	1 Month Response	3 Month Response	6 Month Response
Extremely Effective	0 (0%)	3 (17%)	1 (5%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)
Very Effective	5 (28%)	7 (39%)	8 (44%)	7 (39%)	7 (39%)
Effective	5 (28%)	6 (33%)	6 (33%)	6 (33%)	8 (44%)
Somewhat Effective	7 (39%)	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	3 (17%)	2 (11%)
Not Very Effective	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 4: Effectiveness Levels

Collapsed data in Table 5 below shows that there was an increase in effectiveness over time: initially, and 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months after the workshops. Responses were combined for simplicity. “Extremely Effective,” “Very Effective,” and “Effective,” were collapsed to “Effective,” and “Somewhat Effective” and “Not Very Effective” were collapsed to “Not Very Effective.”

Answers	Pre-training Response	Post-Training Response	1 Month Response	3 Month Response	6 Month Response
Effective	10 (56%)	16 (89%)	15 (83%)	15 (83%)	16 (89%)
Not Very Effective	8 (44%)	2 (11%)	3 (17%)	3 (17%)	2 (11%)

Table 5: Collapsed Data for Effectiveness Levels

At a glance, the data shows that there has been an increase in effectiveness from pre- training (56%) to post training (89%), and a decrease in the number of participants who responded, “Not Very Effective,” 44% to 11%. The one-month and three-month responses showed a slight change. 1 participant shifted back to “Not Very Effective” from 2 to 3. However, the 6-month responses returned to the post-training results. This data was helpful, but to fully understand the effects of the program statistically, a two-tail hypothesis test was done. To do this, the data from each participant had to be coded.

Coding is an analytical process in which data, in this case, from the questionnaires, is categorized to facilitate analysis. Table 6 represents the coded results. Coding was done the following way. Each participant was assigned a number from 1 to 18. The participant’s responses were coded from 1 to 5, where 1 represents “Extremely Effective,” 2 represents “Very Effective,” 3 represents “Effective,” 4 represents “Somewhat Effective,” and 5 represents “Not Very Effective.”

Participants	Pre-training Responses	Post-training Responses	1 Mth Responses	3 Mth Responses	6 Mth Responses
1	4	3	4	3	2
2	3	3	3	2	2
3	4	1	2	2	2
4	4	2	5	4	3
5	4	4	3	1	3
6	2	3	2	2	3
7	4	3	2	2	1
8	4	2	3	3	3
9	4	3	3	3	3
10	2	2	2	2	3
11	3	4	4	4	4
12	3	2	1	2	2
13	3	2	2	2	2
14	2	1	3	3	3
15	3	2	2	2	2
16	2	2	2	1	1
17	2	1	2	4	3
18	5	3	3	3	1

Table 6: Coded Data for Effectiveness Responses

Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the coded data. Since the sample was the same participants, a t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means was used. Since we wanted to test to see if there were any changes in effectiveness after the training, we began by stating the null hypothesis equaled to zero ($H_0 : \mu_d = 0$). The alternative would be is a difference in effectiveness after completing workshops ($H_A : \mu_d \neq 0$). T-test comparisons were made between pre-training and post-training, pre-training and 1 month, pre-training and 3 months, and pre-training and 6 months. Complete t-test results are in Appendix E. The analysis for the change in the participants' effectiveness is as follows:

Effectiveness Analysis

The p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the initial post-training responses was 0.003. The general rule is to reject the null hypothesis when the p-value is less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$). Therefore, in this example, the null hypothesis was

rejected. This showed that there was a statistically significant difference in effectiveness and competency initially after the workshops. The lower and upper confidence levels show a 95% confidence with the mean difference in effectiveness by the participants between 0.25 and 1.28.

The p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the 1-month post-training responses was 0.03. This p-value was also less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was also rejected. This calculation showed that there was still a statistically significant difference in effectiveness one month after the initial training.

The lower and upper confidence levels show a 95% confidence that the mean difference in effectiveness by the participants 1 month after training was between -0.03 and 0.97. There was a slight decrease in the effectiveness range as compared to the initial post training. One reason could be the lack on practice using the material, for as one participant noted, “Haven’t begun working with distressed marriages yet.”

The p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the 3-month post-training responses was 0.02. This p-value was also less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was also rejected. This calculation showed that there was still a statistically significant difference in effectiveness one month after the initial training workshop.

The lower and upper confidence levels show a 95% confidence that the mean difference in effectiveness by the participants 1 month after training was between 0.04 and 1.25, a slight increase from the 1-month results.

Lastly, the p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the 6 months post-training responses was 0.02. This p-value was also less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was also rejected. This shows that there was still a statistically significant difference in effectiveness six month after the initial training.

The lower and upper confidence levels show a 95% confidence that the mean difference in effectiveness by the participants six months after training was between 0.04 and 1.25.

Confidence Analysis

Data from the second question, “Please rate your current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages” is shown in table 7. The participants’ responses from the pre-training questionnaires to the 6-month post training questionnaires are recorded in this table.

Initial analysis shows that 8 participants who responded, “Somewhat confident,” in the pre-training questionnaire, shifted to 0 participants in the 6-month responses. Also, there were 2 participants who responded “Extremely Confident,” as opposed to 0 participants in the pre-training questionnaire.

Answers	Pre-training Response	Post-Training Response	1 Month Response	3 Month Response	6 Month Response
Extremely Confident	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	3 (17%)	2 (11%)
Very Confident	1 (6%)	11 (61%)	10 (56%)	9 (50%)	11 (61%)
Confident	9 (50%)	5 (28%)	4 (22%)	4 (22%)	5 (28%)
Somewhat Confident	8 (44%)	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	0 (0%)
Not at All Confident	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 7: Confidence Levels

Collapsed data shown in Table 8 below shows that there was an increase in confidence, post training, 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months after the workshops. Data was collapsed again for simplicity purposes. “Extremely Confident” “Very Confident,” and “Confident” were collapsed to “Confident;” “Somewhat Confident” and “Not at All Confident” were collapsed to “Not at All Confident.” There was also a significant decrease of “Not at All Confident” responses from 8 to 0, immediately after completion of the training workshops.

Answers	Pre-training Response	Post-Training Response	1 Month Response	3 Month Response	6 Month Response
Confident	10 (56%)	18 (100%)	16 (89%)	16 (89%)	18 (100%)
Not at All Confident	8 (44%)	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	0 (0%)

Table 8: Collapsed Data for Confident Levels

Coding for the responses to confidence was also done. The participants’ assignment numbers 1 to 18 were used. The participant’s responses were coded from 1 to 5, where 1 represents, “Extremely Confident,” 2 represents, “Very Confident,” 3 represents, “Confident,” 4 represents, “Somewhat Confident,” and 5 represents, “Not at All Confident.”

Participants	Pre-training Responses	Post-training Responses	1 Mth Responses	3 Mth Responses	6 Mth Responses
1	4	2	4	3	2
2	3	3	1	2	1
3	4	1	3	2	2
4	4	1	4	4	3
5	4	3	2	1	2
6	4	3	2	2	2
7	3	2	2	2	2
8	3	2	2	3	3
9	3	3	3	2	2
10	3	2	2	2	2
11	3	2	3	3	3
12	4	2	1	1	2
13	4	2	2	2	2
14	3	2	3	3	3
15	4	3	2	2	2
16	2	2	2	1	1
17	3	2	2	4	3
18	3	3	2	2	2

Table 9: Coded Data for Confident Responses

The p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the initial post-training responses was 0. Since the p-value was less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$), the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there is a statistically significant difference in confidence levels after the initial training.

The lower and upper confidence levels show a 95% confidence that the mean difference in confidence by the participants is between 0.78 and 1.68.

The p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the 1-month post-training responses was 0.0001. This p-value was also less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was also rejected. This calculation showed that there was still a statistically significant difference in confidence one month after the initial training.

The lower and upper confidence levels showed a 95% confidence that the mean difference in confidence levels by the participants 1 month after training was between -0.59 and 1.54. There was also a slight decrease in the confidence levels as compared to the initial post training.

The p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the 3 months post-training responses was 0.0004. This p-value was also less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was also rejected. This showed that there was still a statistically significant difference in confidence levels 3 months after the initial training.

The lower and upper confidence levels show a 95% confidence that the mean difference in confidence by the participants 3 month after training was between 0.56 and 1.67, a slight increase from the 1-month results.

Lastly, the p-value calculated from the pre-training responses to the 6 months post-training responses was 0. This p-value was also less than or equal to alpha ($\alpha=0.05$).

Therefore, the null hypothesis was also rejected. This shows that there was still a statistically significant difference in confidence levels six month after the initial training.

The lower and upper confidence levels showed a 95% confidence that the mean difference in confidence levels by the participants six months after training was between 0.82 and 1.64. One participant noted, “I am very confident now because I have been equipped with a lot of new information and strategies to help me in the counseling setting. I have more confidence working with couples in complicated situations, such as domestic violence, addictions and substance abuse or chronic affairs and adultery.”

CHAPTER 6 MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

Process and Summary

The members of the Site Team communicated via email and phone to complete the evaluation of the researcher's ministerial competencies. A summary of the Site Team's assessments of ministerial competencies is as follows:

Theologian

Pastor Delroy has a comprehensive understanding of the scriptures and biblical truths. Additional biblical training will allow him to become more effective as a marriage counselor to help in the healing process of broken families.

Preacher/Interpreter of Sacred Texts

Pastor Delroy is a dynamic and well-organized preacher of the word of God. He upholds biblical truths which is evident in his sermons. He can develop his knowledge and interpretation of the Bible in regards to the area of marriage.

Worship Leader

This competency is not applicable to Pastor Delroy.

Prophetic Agent

Pastor Delroy is compassionate and shows understanding of others' suffering. He is able to embrace his convictions from the word of God while showing empathy to others in need. He will need to develop his understanding of different cultures and his understanding of the world from a global perspective.

Leader

Pastor Delroy is effective in his ability to lead others into their own encounter with God. He is able to give constructive criticism and his lifestyle draws others to God. He will develop his ability to effectively lead couples who have experienced brokenness back to God.

Religious Educator

Pastor Delroy demonstrates an ability to have open dialogue with others. He shows a distinct ability to train and supervise other religious educators. He will develop his knowledge and implement new resources to bring hurting couples back to the point of reconciliation.

Counselor

Pastor Delroy is an excellent listener and he demonstrates an ability to show empathy to others. He will seek to understand and implement counseling strategies to help hurting families. He will also develop the ability to recognize his own limitations and make appropriate referrals when necessary.

Pastor

Pastor Delroy is able to encourage newcomers and nurtures long-time members. He will improve his skills to extend “soul care” to families who are hurting. He will also learn and implement “self-care” strategies.

Spiritual Leader

Pastor Delroy is effective in leading spiritual retreats, meetings and services. He will develop his skills to guide married couples on the spiritual journey as they heal and

overcome life challenges. He must be able to sense the working of the Holy Spirit and be able to convey hope to hurting couples.

Ecumenist

This competency is not applicable to pastor Delroy.

Witness or Evangelist

Pastor Delroy is always enthusiastic to confess and share the fundamentals of his faith with others. He will continue to share the good news about salvation in all areas of his life including during a counseling session with a married couple.

Administrator

This competency not needed for the development of pastor Delroy's demonstration project.

Professional

Pastor Delroy is open, honest and personable in his relationship with others. He has a positive attitude towards self and others. He will continue to develop his skills on how to constructively deal with conflict.

Pastoral Skills

Pastor Delroy is able to respect the physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries of others. He has the ability to assess the spiritual needs of the couples and minister effectively to them. He is able to maintain appropriate boundaries and know when to seek assistance from others.

Interpersonal Skills

Pastor Delroy is able to respond to the needs of others and give feedback that will increase productivity and fosters growth. He has the ability to resolve conflicts in a pastoral and skillful manner and therefore needs to continue in this competency.

Faith Rooted Community Organizer

This competency is not applicable to Pastor Delroy.

Competencies Chosen for Development

The site team members and this researcher were in agreement that the following competencies needed to be developed for this demonstration project: “Counselor” and “Pastoral Skills.” All also agreed that some aspects of other competencies were also helpful in this project. For example, some aspects of the “Spiritual Leader” competency can help strengthen the “Pastoral Skills” competency. Some aspects of the “Interpersonal Skills” competency can help strengthen the “Counselor” competency. The researcher’s assessments of ministerial competencies chosen are examined below.

I Counselor: The Goal was to become a more effective counselor.

This competency was absolutely necessary for the development of this proposal and project. The handout states that “counseling is concerned with the work of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling.”¹⁹⁸ In order to equip pastors, the writer had to first be able to demonstrate competence and confidence in helping distressed couples. The writer needed to be able to establish relationships and demonstrate openness and genuineness. These qualities help couples to move

27. ¹⁹⁸ Wanda M. Lundy, *Site Team Handbook* (New York: New York Theological Seminary, 2015),

towards their journey of wholeness. The writer needed to be able to become more knowledgeable regarding human psychological development. The writer also needed to be able to recognize his limits as a counselor and be able to make appropriate referrals when necessary.

The “Interpersonal Skill” competency can help strengthen the “Counseling Skills” competency by helping the researcher to respond to the needs of others and give feedback that will increase productivity and fosters growth. This will enable this writer, in a pastoral and skillful manner, to help couples resolve conflicts.

Strategies: The following strategies were chosen to help develop this competency:

- A. The researcher will seek to enroll in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) courses.
- B. The researcher will engage in the study of different counseling techniques.
- C. The researcher will visit counseling seminars designed to help equip pastors.
- D. The researcher will be applying counseling strategies to actual counseling sessions with distressed couples.
- E. The researcher will go through at least one marriage enrichment program.

Updated Evaluation and Personal Growth #1

The above strategies were aimed at equipping the researcher and pastors to “help others to sustain, to endure, and to work through difficulties or crises.”¹⁹⁹ The Hope Conquers Workshops has allowed the writer to develop his competency and confidence

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

as a counselor. The researcher is now at least 50% more confident and competent when dealing with marriages in distress.

At the time of writing, the researcher was not able to enroll in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) courses. However, this research has allowed for a deeper engagement in the study of many different counseling techniques.

The researcher is applying different counseling strategies from the workshops. The researcher was also able to go through one marriage enrichment program called “Marriage Works.”

II Pastoral Skills: The goal was to be able to assess the spiritual needs of distressed couples and counsel effectively.

As a pastor, the writer needed to be able to respect the emotional, physical and spiritual boundaries of others. This writer needed to have the ability to assess the spiritual needs of the couples and minister effectively to them. This writer also needs to be able to maintain appropriate boundaries and know when to seek assistance from others. Lastly, the writer needed to be able to respect diversity and differences.

The “Spiritual Leader” competency can help strengthen the “Pastor Skills” competency by enabling the researcher to be able to sense the presence and working of the Holy Spirit within a family. The researcher needed to be able to convey to hurting couples that the power of the Holy Spirit is able to bring about change.

Strategies: The following strategies were chosen to help develop this competency:

- A. The researcher will be interviewing other pastors to gain insights on how to respond in crisis situations.
- B. The researcher will be reading sources on how to improve my pastoral skills.

- C. The researcher will look into attending pastoral counseling seminars.
- D. The researcher will study specific scriptures dealing with pastoral and counseling skills.

Updated Evaluation and Personal Growth #2

The above strategies were aimed at equipping this researcher and pastors to handle the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of couples who are in distress. This researcher has improved on the pastoral skills competency by at least 50%. This researcher was able to increase his knowledge-base on topics and specific Scripture dealing with marriage. The workshops allowed this researcher to gain valuable insights on how to respond to crisis situations. This writer is ready to deal with any distressed marriages.

CHAPTER 7 NEXT STEPS

Strengths of the Demonstration Project Design and Implementation

Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program has proven to have many strengths. One of the main strengths of the program was have amazing support provided by the site team, the participant, NYTS (including cohort group) and the researcher's advisor. The site team members were very instrumental in helping to develop and execute this program. The support and feedback from the pastors throughout the process was very helpful. The encouragement of the researcher's cohort through the Facebook group helped tremendously. The Resource Days at NYTS was of great help. Finally, the researcher's advisor aided tremendously in the development of this program and its success.

Another strength of the program is the way the materials were presented. The program was structured to facilitate feedback and to engage the participants. One participant responded, "The workshop was very helpful, constructive and well planned." Another noted, "The workshops were very informative and it provided practical examples." The practical examples used throughout the workshop helped to hold the participants' interest.

Another additional strength of the program was that it catered to equipping pastors. One participant noted that many programs are more designed to help couples as

opposed to helping pastors to help couples. Hope Conquers achieved this intended purpose.

Weaknesses of the Demonstration Project Design and Implementation

Some weaknesses of the program design and implementation are as follows. The first weakness is that of the number of participants. Despite the numerous hours of efforts spent on awareness and promotion of event, only 25 came to awareness seminar of which 18 participated in the project.

Another weakness is the untimely responses of some participants to the post training questionnaires. Pastors' busy schedules may have contributed to this. It was a struggle to get all participants to respond to questionnaires. Then, when all responses were in, some questions were left blank. One site team member was given the assignment to reach out to all participants, especially for the completion of 3 and 6 months questionnaires.

Lastly, the self-reporting of competency and confidence by the participants could have been obscured because of various levels on skills and background. 5 (29%) of the participants responded that "Marriage Counseling," was one of the training done prior to the workshops. One participant specifically mentioned that he did four Bible school training classes in counseling. However, the workshops still added to his knowledge base.

Suggested Changes

The last question in the six-month post questionnaire, "Please describe any changes or suggestions you would like to see in the "Hope Conquers" workshops," was included to gain insights for suggested changes in future workshops. One participant suggested, "The time span between training sessions should be shorter." This researcher

can understand this concern since the workshops were one week apart and therefore may consider keeping it as a two-day weekend workshop in the future.

Another participant suggested, “I would like to see couples with great testimony return and share at future workshops. Even if it’s in one specific area, e.g. communication.” This is a great suggestion and can bring in the element of application of the material. This would also be considered in future workshops.

Another participant responded, “An expansion in dealing with couples in complicated situations, such as psychological disorders and homosexuality.” This researcher is in agreement with this and is already thinking of additional subjects to add to the “Unrelenting Problem” section of the workshop.

Another participant suggested, “I will like to see you continue to apply all the biblical concepts to your projects.” Biblical concepts will continue to be applied to the workshops.

After the two workshops in April, the researcher’s Senior Pastor suggested a “couple’s edition” of the program. Hope Conquer: Marriage Enrichment Workshop, couple’s edition was introduced.²⁰⁰ It was a 1-day modified version of the pastors’ edition. It focused on the first eight sections of the HOPECONQUERS acronym. 28 couples participated in the workshop, which was higher than the turnout for the pastors. Further studies will have to be done.

²⁰⁰ Flyer in Appendix D.

Future Projects

Future projects in the “Hope Conquers” series are already in the planning stage. Modifications and additions in the Unrelenting Problems section of the program are already being considered.

A second part to the “Hope Conquers” couples’ edition will be coming sometime in the future.

Conclusion

Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program was intended to equip pastors to help couples who are in distressed marriages. This research was intended to answer the question, “Would a training in a new marriage enrichment program called Hope Conquers Distress increase a pastor’s self-reported competency and confidence, and effectively inject hope into a couple whose marriage is in distress?” Based on this research, the answer is yes.

The training program included biblical principles about marriage, divorce, forgiveness, reconciliation, and conflict resolution from the story of the woman accused of adultery (John 7:53-8:11). Jesus was able to model the role of a pastor who is able to recognize distress, and inject hope. As hope is injected, reconciliation becomes possible as conflicts are resolved and couples learn to extend and receive forgiveness from each other.

The research also shows that typical pastors are generally trained to provide biblical counseling. Therefore, specific training is needed in marriage counseling for many pastors. Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program can be the means by which pastors can gain some basic marriage counseling skills needed to

help couples who are in distressed marriages. The program also recommends that a pastor should make any necessary referrals after 5 sessions.

The strategy used by this program is, “Faith working through love from conviction,” where the need for conviction must be stressed throughout the counseling sessions. A pastor can increase conviction in couples by helping them to recognize behaviors that go against biblical teachings, moral standards, or Christ-like characteristics. It is from conviction that “Hope Conquers Distress.”

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Proposal

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT TRAINING PROGRAM:
HOPE CONQUERS DISTRESS

By

DELROY FREDERICKS

New York Theological Seminary

November 5, 2016

Challenge Statement

As pastor at Jesus Deliverance Mission Int'l located in Brooklyn, NY, I have performed many weddings and approximately half of them encounter major problems, which can lead to divorce. Christian marriages are in distress. According to Banks research, the Christian divorce rate is higher than 42% (Banks 2011). If this problem is not addressed, family disasters will continue to escalate. This demonstration project will develop a marriage enrichment training program to equip pastors to give hope and restoration to distressed couples.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

Jesus Deliverance Mission Int'l Brooklyn (JDMIBklyn) was founded by Apostle Coreen Smith in 2007. The ministry started with Pastor Colleen Kendall and about ten members, and I. Subsequently, in 2011 I was later ordained a pastor to the gospel ministry. My role in the ministry includes preaching, training in Christian education through Bible study, counseling, performing weddings, baby dedications, funerals and other special service events. Administrative duties includes planning special service events and scheduling preaching assignments. As treasurer, I prepare and oversee budget proposals and I am responsible for all ministerial expenses. Annual financial updates are given to the Committee board and then members of the church.

JDMIBklyn is located in the East New York Section of Brooklyn, District 5. The estimated population of this district in 2014 was approximately 9.3 million. This section of Brooklyn consists of predominantly black or of African American race at 65.7%. Whites are about 15.1%, and other races at 15.5%. The other races includes Hispanics or Latino, Mexicans, Asians and Puerto Ricans.¹ JDMIBklyn is committed to serving all in this diverse community as is reflected in the motto below.

¹ <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF> (Assessed Aug 30, 2016)

The motto for the ministry is, “Receiving God’s Promises and Power Gift to Serve All.”² The ministry provides ample care, support and service to its members through the programs and services. The ministry appreciates the diversity of gifts and encourages all members to use their gifts. JDMIBklyn believes that every gift is valuable. Paul writes, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them:” (Romans 12:4-6).

The mission of JDMIBklyn is, to introduce people to the Lord Jesus Christ, mentor them into a Christ-like relationship with the Father and help them to discover and use their spiritual gifts. The ministry equips the believer for service, and send them out into the world to introduce others to the Lord Jesus Christ.³

Spiritual growth in all members is desired. The church focuses on teaching the Word, with the understanding that, “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). To aide in the spiritual development of our members, the ministry sets forth a spiritual goal every week. The spiritual goal is based on the sermon preached that Sunday. As an example, a goal for a sermon on forgiveness would be to forgive someone for that week. Prayer meetings and Bible studies are highly recommended to all members.

JDMIBklyn is a small but growing family church. The seating capacity is 50 and averages 25-30 worshippers on any given Sunday. On special services, seating is filled to

² The motto was later introduced in 2010.

³ This information is found in the Articles of the Church.

capacity. The church space is not currently accessible to wheelchair. Accessibility issues are currently being evaluated as we are exploring ways for the church to make a greater mark within the community.

There are about 12 different families who regularly attend JDMIBklyn. The ages range from 1 to 93 years and comprise of nine children, twelve teenagers and nineteen adults. The primary language spoken is English. All bulletins and church information are printed in English.

Traditionally, the church is non-denominational, with a Pentecostal background. This is seen in our world-view. Some of the essential principles of our faith are as follows are stated in the Articles of Church Documents:⁴

1. We believe that the Bible alone is God's Word. The Scriptures are infallible, inerrant, and the sole and final authority for all matters of faith and conduct (2 Timothy 3:16; Cor. 2:13).
2. We believe in the Eternal Godhead who has revealed Himself as One God existing in Three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinguishable but indivisible (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).
3. We believe the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of men, was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-35; John 1:14-18; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).
4. We believe in the salvation of sinners by grace, through repentance and faith in the perfect and sufficient work of the cross of Calvary by which we obtain remission of sins (Ephesians 2:8-9; Heb. 9:12; Rom 5:11).

⁴ Article 5 of Church Documents.

5. We believe in the necessity of water baptism by immersion in the Name of the Eternal Godhead in order to fulfill the command of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:34-36; 19:1-6).
6. We believe the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and that He is an abiding helper, teacher, and guide (John 6:13, 14:16-17 and 16:8-11; Romans 8:26).
7. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit and in the exercise of all biblical gifts of the Spirit according to the instructions given to us in 1 Corinthians 12-14.
8. We believe in eternal life for believers (John 3:16; 5:24), and eternal punishment for the unbelievers (Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Rev 20:10-15).

JDMIBklyn started in 2007 with Sunday worship service at 2:00 pm and Bible study on Mondays at 6:30 pm. In 2008, Bible study moved to Thursdays at 7:30 pm and prayer meeting was introduced on Tuesdays at 7:30 pm. In 2009 the Sunday worship service moved to 12:00 pm and Sunday school was introduced at 11:00 am. In 2014, changes were made to the service times. Sunday worship service started at 11:00 am and Sunday school started at 10:00 am. In 2015, the Christmas day service started on Christmas Eve at 10:00 pm. This year, 2016, Sunday school was renamed Christian education. All changes were reviewed and approved by the Committee board.

JDMIBklyn seems to resonate more with Avery Dulles' fellowship model.⁵ The order of service at JDMIBklyn includes the following: Opening prayers, Worship, reading of Psalms, Welcome, Announcements, Word, Communion, Offering, and

⁵ "Introduction to the Setting: Guide to Writing a Congregational Profile," p5.

Benediction. The reading of Proverbs and the reading of a verse by a young person was introduced in 2013. Currently, the service includes reading of the Psalms, Proverbs and a young person reads a verse from the Scripture. This part of the service I would not allow to be changed.

The Church has its roots in Guyanese traditions. Guyana is on the mainland of South America but is considered to be a part of the Caribbean region. As a result, Guyanese culture is similar with the cultures of islands in the West Indies. The Guyanese culture is shown through the type of music and the type of foods served at special events. Both the music and the foods are Caribbean oriented. Music includes reggae and soca beats to many gospel songs. Foods include jerk chicken, curry chicken, cook-up rice, roti and pouri. Many members feel at home in JDMIBklyn. According to Plaza,

The Caribbean is a “home” of the imagination, helping to develop and further define the region itself (Goulbourne and Solomos 2004). Caribbean people are influenced by a polychronic sense of time, space, and relationships (Hall 1976). Those migrants who did leave retained cultural baggage that included Caribbean food preferences, musical tastes, a colorful patios language, superstitions, myths, folklore, and unique living arrangements and family structures.⁶

JDMIBklyn may not be racially and ethnically diverse, since most families are related to Caribbean traditions and do tend to maintain their “home” identity. As a result the church has started to implement more contemporary music, like Shackles by Mary Mary, in the worship and has added some variations in the foods, like, quiche, which are served at events.

⁶ Dwaine Plaza, “Roti and Doubles as Comfort Foods for the Trinidadian Diaspora in Canada, the United States, and Britain,” *Social Research* 81, no. 2 (Summer 2014 2014): 464. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed August 31, 2016).

The membership of JDMIBklyn consist of those persons who, express their desire for membership, demonstrate a willingness to cooperate with the purpose of the fellowship and meet the following qualifications as stated in the Church's constitution.

1. Personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, water immersion baptism and a desire to obey the requirements set forth in Acts 2:36-47.
2. Agreement with the Doctrines of Faith as stated in the Statement of Beliefs.
3. A lifestyle that is in consistent with Christian conduct and doctrine.
4. Regular attendance at the activities of the Church.
5. Financial support of the Church by tithes and freewill offerings.
6. Voluntary submission to the spiritual oversight of the Church.
7. Application for membership submitted to the Committee.⁷

The demographics of the ministry varies. The educational background and income levels of our members varies. The mean income in 2014 for the East New York section of Brooklyn was \$45940.⁸ However, 51% of the population income is less than \$34999.00.⁹ These percentages are reflected in JDMIBklyn, as many members are unemployed, low income or on fixed income. Income levels at JDMIBklyn ranges from zero to middle class. Support to the ministry comes through the faithful giving of its members. Educational background ranges from high school to graduate educated. The ministry has three persons with graduate degrees, including myself, who enrolled in seminary at Liberty University and attained a M.Div. degree in 2013. Now I am the first to pursue a doctorate degree.

JDMIBrooklyn is guided by the Committee Board. The Board prays for the ministry, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and according to the Word of God.

⁷ Churches Constitution, Article 6.

⁸ <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

⁹ Ibid.

The Committee consists of the senior pastor, assistant pastor/treasurer, elder, minister and two deacons. The Board oversees all the following programs: Bible Study, Prayer Meeting, Men's Ministry, Women's Ministry, Dance Ministry, Young People/ Youth Ministry, and Christian Education. The Board also ensures proper training for leaders through special teachings, workshops and seminars.

The most important programs in the life of this congregation are Bible Study, Prayer Meeting, Young People/Youth Ministry and Christian Education. The emphasis of the programs is to promote spiritual growth in all members in accordance to Romans 10:17 which states, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

Some programs, like Women's and Men's Ministry were introduced but are not fully functional as yet. The problem is finding the leadership support for these ministries. Even though these programs can be abandoned without affecting the ministry significantly, we are in the process of revitalizing them and possibly adding a Children's Choir ministry.

The decision making process of JDMIBklyn rests on the Committee members. All programs are evaluated and then approved by the board.¹⁰ The board values the opinions of all members when evaluating and approving any program. The formal process is by unanimous vote. Committee meetings are held every three months or as deemed necessary. The financial support for the church comes primarily from those who are on the board. However, this does not influence the decision-making process because there are also those on the board who are unable to contribute much financially.

¹⁰ Committee Members Guidelines, JDMIBklyn, 1.

JDMIBklyn understands that communication is vital for any ministry to succeed. The formal channels of communication comes through written sources, social media and oral announcements. Most forms of communication occurs during service every Sunday. Official reports pertaining to the ministry are revealed in members' meetings. Members' meetings are held quarterly, beginning in January. I do not believe there are any substantial informal channels of communication because members are encouraged to speak up and make suggestions in the members' meetings.

It is the responsibility of the Sr. Pastor and I to see that communication is carried out efficiently and effectively. Therefore, we must always be informed and available to speak about any programs, issues or concerns of the congregation. Church announcements are given every Sunday or as needed. Facebook, email and text are other ways we communicate with our members.

JDMIBklyn currently involves its members when planning to achieve any goal. Members volunteer their help for special services and events. There are a few faithful members who will take on additional responsibilities if needed. Even though we are a branch of the church in Guyana, we do not solicit any help or support from the mother church.

One critical issue currently facing the ministry is that we do not have enough space in our building to function efficiently. Therefore, we are in the process of finding a more suitable place for our services. To aide in this process, we have implemented a special building fund drive. This special fund allow our members to contribute financially towards the future building. The church utilizes its backyard for many special events such as BBQ fundraisers, prayer breakfasts and outdoor services.

As a pastor and teacher of the Word, theological issues and doctrine are very important to JDMIBklyn. Bible study is primarily used for this purpose. Over the past years we have studied the doctrine of God, the doctrine of humanity, Christology, doctrine of the Holy Spirit, doctrine of salvation and doctrine of the church.

Marriage is currently the topic of discussion at JDMIBklyn. There are nine married couples in the ministry and two thirds (67%) of the marriages are in distressed. This amount is extremely higher than the estimated Christian amount of 42%.¹¹ Topics of discussion includes, "God's Design for Marriage," "Godly Roles of Husbands and Wives," "Communication and Conflict Resolution," "Biblical Principles of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage," "Parenting," and "Finances in Marriage."

I have seen significant growth in our members who are committed to Bible study. Members are able to expound on Scripture and to understand biblical what the Bible teaches about controversial topics, such as abortion or same-sex marriage. JDMIBklyn believes these discussions are necessary for spiritual growth. One area that we will be studying soon is Christian Eschatology, or the doctrine of the end times.

¹¹ Adele M. Banks. "Christians question divorce statistics." Star Tribune, March 17, 2011: Variety Section. E5. (US Census data- 6.8 weddings per 1000 people vs. 3.6 divorces per 1000 people)

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

As pastor at Jesus Deliverance Mission Int'l located in Brooklyn, NY, I have performed many weddings and approximately half of them encounter major problems, which can lead to divorce. Christian marriages are in distress. According to Banks research, the Christian divorce rate is higher than 42% (Banks 2011). If this problem is not addressed, family disasters will continue to escalate. This demonstration project will develop a marriage enrichment training program to equip pastors to give hope and restoration to distressed couples.

I selected this issue because 67%¹² of the marriages at JDMIBklyn are in distress.

Distressed couples sometimes seek out help from their pastors. Many pastors are placed on the “front lines” and can be of tremendous help if equipped. However, many pastors are not trained to help distressed couples. Some distressed couples may feel that there is little hope for their marriage. Pastors, because they are seen as spiritual leaders and reservoirs of hope, can be of help to struggling couples. However, if the pastor does not seem confident and competent, a couple in distress may leave the meeting not feeling hopeful about their marriage. This demonstration project will train pastors by allowing them to explore marriage stressors and inject hope into distressed marriages. Pastors will learn to provide immediate practical steps, implement ongoing solutions, and make necessary referrals to help couples to heal and avoid the many disasters associated with distressed marriages.

¹² The Sr. Pastor and I share the responsibility of counseling these couples who are in distress.

As a pastor, I have a high sense of urgency concerning this problem. My cultural and personal experiences in marriage have allowed me to recognize that there is a lot at stake in terms of the biblical, theological, historical, social, economic, psychological and spiritual dimensions.

Culturally, marriages in Guyana are similar to that of the Caribbean in that there are three common forms. According to Samuel and Wilson, the three common forms of unions are visiting unions, common law unions and married unions.

Visiting or keeper unions are the most unstable type and are usually characterized by only one partner with no commitments from the man, who merely visits for sexual gratification (Roberts, 1955, Barrow, 1999). The relationship is transitory in nature but may lead to marriage or common-law unions, often resulting in the formation of female-headed households (Manyoni, 1980). Common-law unions tends to be more permanent than visiting unions, although not legally recognized in the post slavery era, it is currently protected by law and usually requires the sharing of a home and resources for the upkeep of the family (Manyoni, 1980).¹³

Married unions in Guyana can be examined through two major groups of people, Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese. Most Indo-Guyanese marriages are arranged.¹⁴ Since divorce is frowned upon in the Indian tradition, many couples continue to live together even if their marriage is in distress.¹⁵

Some studies suggest that Indo-Caribbean women are married early, and then move into visiting or common-law unions later as compared to Afro-Caribbean women who tend to become involved in visiting unions before they decide to marry.¹⁶ Most low-

¹³ Preethy S. Samuel and Leon C. Wilson, "Values and Beliefs of Indo-Guyanese: An Assessment of the Assimilation Hypothesis" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 2008).

¹⁴ Preethy S Samuel and Leon C. Wilson, "Structural Arrangements of Indo-Guyanese Family: An Assessment of the Assimilation Hypothesis," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 40, no. 3 (May 2009): 442. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed August 3, 2016).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

income Afro- Caribbean families have experienced visiting and common-law unions.¹⁷ It is important for pastors to recognize and understand the cultural context of the couples to better help them through their situations.

Biblically and theologically, God's plan for marriage is at stake. Pastors must be able to help distressed couples understand God's design for marriage. In summary, marriage is a covenant, not just a contract, between a man and a woman (Gen 2:23-24). A covenant is stronger than a contract, in that, "the parties to a covenant obligated themselves to carry out their respective commitments under the penalty of divine retribution should they later attempt to avoid them."¹⁸ For this reason, marriage vows were to be taken seriously (Numbers 30:2). Distressed marriages, if not addressed can lead to divorce.

Secular society today would prefer to see distressed couples divorce, rather than work towards restoration. Dockery points out:

The Bible emphasizes that God Himself intends marriage to be a lifelong covenant relationship between one man and one woman. God declares His hatred of divorce (Mal 2:16). Both the Lord and Paul appealed consistently to the creation ordinance of marriage for their teaching. The Bible nowhere demands or even recommends the divorce. Instead, forgiveness and reconciliation are urged (1 Cor 7:11). Any exceptions are given grudgingly, as a way of regulating sinful conditions. In short, the easy acceptability of modern divorce is foreign to the Bible."¹⁹

¹⁷ "Values and Beliefs of Indo-Guyanese: An Assessment of the Assimilation Hypothesis."

¹⁸ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 299.

¹⁹ David S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 854-55.

God's best desire for marriages is to see marriages thrive. The roles of the husband and the wife are distorted when the couples are in distress. The Bible teaches that the husband is the head (1 Cor 11:3). Headship is referring to position, and not inequality, since God is mentioned in the same verse as the head of Christ.²⁰ The husband should obey God and love, honor, and protect his wife as he would his own body (Eph. 5:23, 25, 28-29). The husband must understand what it means to live with his wife in an understanding way (1 Peter 3:7). Husbands and wives must learn what it means to submit to each other (Eph 5:21). The wife should obey God and also understand what it means to submit to her own husband "as to the Lord" (Eph. 5: 22, 24). Pastors must be able to effectively reinforce roles in distressed relationships. The family, which is an important unit of the community and the society, can then be strengthened.

When marriages are in distress, families are at stake. Research has shown that distressed marriages affect the family negatively. Parenting skills becomes poorer. When parenting skills are poorer, children seems to adjust poorly to parents. The negative effects continues as conflicts between siblings escalates and parent-child conflicts increases. Children are affected more negatively from distressed marriages and studies also show that behavioral problems increases.²¹ The negative effects on the family can be reversed when pastors are able to inject hope into the distressed marriage.

Socially, marriages are at stake. One of the most significant trends revealed when studying distressed marriages is how individuals view marriage. Many adults and

²⁰ Tony Evans, *Kingdom Marriage: Connecting God's Purpose with Your Pleasure* (Carol Stream Illinois: Focus on the Family, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 350.

²¹ Frank D. Fincham and Steven R. H. Beach, "CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE: Implications for Working with Couples," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50, (Feb 1999): 47.

children now view marriage differently as a result of living in distressed marriage situations or seeing the effects of someone who is in a distressed marriage. Worthington writes,

In the United States, our cultural understanding of marriage, especially among late high school and college students and those approaching the traditional marrying age, has continued to change. Whereas polls show that almost all people hold marriage as a personal goal for themselves, few are willing to argue that marriage is socially beneficial and good for virtually everyone in society.²²

Pastors can impact this negative cultural understanding when they effectively inject hope into distressed marriages and begin to see noticeable differences in the marriages.

Distressed couples' health is also at stake. Since healthy marriages helps to promote health and well-being, then distressed marriages can increase a person's risk of physical and psychological dysfunction. Studies show that distressed marriages correlate with increased cases of illnesses. For example, cardiac disease, cancer, and chronic pain.²³ Distressed marriages are also linked to depression, eating disorders, increased physical and psychological abuse of partners, alcoholism, including episodic drinking, binge drinking, and out-of-home drinking.²⁴ This is quite alarming and must be seriously addressed if the current trend of distressed marriages in the church is to be changed. Well-equipped pastors can help in this cause.

Spiritually distressed marriages impact the husband, wife and children. Ideally, couples are encouraged to tend to the souls of their marriage through church fellowship,

²² Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: IVP Academic, 2005), xvii.

²³ Karen B Schmaling, "Physical health and relationships," *Clinical handbook of marriage and couples interventions*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc): 323-345.

²⁴ "CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE: Implications for Working with Couples," 47.

worshipping, praying and studying God's Word together. Parents can then impart biblical wisdom to their children. This seldom happens when couples are in distress. Thus, the children are affected spiritually also.

The ultimate goal for my project is to equip pastors to be more confident and competent when dealing with distressed marriages and make appropriate referrals when needed. The source hope for the future can come through the marriage enrichment training program, Hope Conquers Distress. This training program will equip pastors to effect change in the couple's relationship. Changing the nature of any relationship requires time, patience and experience in problem resolution and systemic modification.²⁵ Problem resolution refers to the effectiveness of different treatment strategies to target specific problems of the marital relationship. Some treatment strategies are, "facilitating communication, restructuring cognition, expressing affect, modifying behavior, negotiating conflict, fostering trust, clarifying family of origin issues, and other change processes."²⁶ A pastor who is exposed and becomes experience in some of these techniques can be an asset in helping distressed couples.

Equipped pastors can also help change the nature of distressed couple's relationship through system modification. System modification refers to the effectiveness of the same treatment strategies above but the goal is different. The goal is to "target the fundamental dynamics to the relationship," by modifying the basic functioning of the relational system and by establishing new ways of relating.²⁷ Systemic change is needed

²⁵ Gerald R. Weeks, *Treating Couples: The Intersystem Model of the Marriage Council of Philadelphia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

in the counseling process and can yield great results when helping distressed couples. Weeks notes, “The powerful effects of systemic change make it unnecessary for therapy to address each and every problem area. By targeting key relational dynamics, the therapist maximizes the leverage for change in broad areas of the relationship.”²⁸ Distressed marriages can benefit tremendously from counseling strategies that produces systemic change. Pastors who are trained in these areas or can make referrals, can help couples towards the road of recovery.

I am very passionate about helping pastors to be equipped in helping distressed couples. I expect pastors to become confident in helping distressed couples explore why they are in distress, and to help couples make the necessary steps to come out of their hurtful situations. My desire is to train pastors on how to inject hope into distressed marriages after analyzing the root causes of their issues. Some of the most basic causes for distress in marriages are as follows: spiritual issues, communication issues, financial issues, sexuality issues, immoral sexual issues, abuse issues, health issues and personality issues. I expect pastors to be capable enough to help couples to realize the negative effects of marital distress on the family. The couple will then be allowed them to make a commitment to a series of counseling sessions and/or workshops that will offer ongoing solutions, hope and reconciliation.

I am in the process of gathering the necessary resources to address this challenge. There are some valuable resources within the site team. My wife, Winnet Fredericks, who is a Licensed Master Social worker, brings some of her counseling expertise to my demonstration project. She also brings some ideas about intervention techniques to my

²⁸ Ibid.

research. My dad, Norbert Fredericks, who has been married for over 40 years to my mom, Joy Fredericks, brings his experiences and knowledge to my demonstration project. The other members on my site team, Pastor Dr. Cheryl Baker, Elder Charles and Pastor Colleen Kendall, bring spiritual insights, discernment, and insights from their experience of divorce, to help distressed couples.

Outside of the site team, I will gain resources from church members, family members and friends who are in distressed marriage situations. Financial support for this project will come from the researcher, family, friends, the church and fundraising events as required.

CHAPTER 3

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: To raise awareness among pastors in the NY area about the distressing state of marriages and the need for competence and confidence by pastors when dealing with distressed marriages.

Strategy 1: Conduct meeting with pastors from my congregation and other churches in the NY area to raise awareness, seek out willing participants, and give out marriage questionnaire designed to explore areas needed to be addressed in distressed marriages (Dec 2016, Site Team and Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Strategy 2: Prepare and preach (2) sermons on God's design, plan, and hope for reconciliation for distressed marriages (Dec 2016, Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Strategy 3: Use social media to raise awareness (Nov 2016, Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Evaluation of Goal 1: A pre-test questionnaire will be administered to pastors to determine their awareness of the state of marriage and their competence and confidence level when dealing with distressed marriages. At least 75% of participants will indicate that they are aware of the state of marriages but do not feel confident and competent

when dealing with couples in crisis. These participants will determine the success of this program.

Goal 2: To develop a team that will help to create Demonstration Project.

Strategy 1: Determine selection criteria for pastors who will attend the upcoming marriage training workshops (Nov 2016, Site Team and Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Strategy 2: Identify and select pastors

Strategy 3: Determine selection criteria for team based on skillsets (Nov 2016, Site Team and Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Strategy 4: Identify and select team members: Example: counselor, event planner, flyer designer, teacher, etc.

Evaluation of Goal 2: Selection criteria for pastors will be based on availability and commitment level to training program. This questionnaire will be given at the first meeting. Of the pastors who attend, at least 50% will be very interested in attending next 2 workshops. This interest will determine their commitment level and availability level.

Goal 3: Develop and implement training curriculum.

Strategy 1: Organize previously researched areas of distress that will be used in program (Nov 2016 – Feb 2017, Site Team and Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Strategy 2: Select hope filled counseling strategies that will be a part of the curriculum (Nov 2016- Feb 2017 Site Team and Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Strategy 3: Seek out a list of approved counselors and agencies when referrals are needed (Nov 2016 - Feb 2017, Site Team will do this).

Strategy 4: Create a workbook for training curriculum (Nov 2016 - Feb 2017, Site Team and Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Evaluation of Goal 3: At least 50% of referral counselors and agencies must be within NY area. At least 50% of training curriculum must be completed by Jan 2017 and 100% Completion of training curriculum by Feb 2017.

Goal 4: Use curriculum to train pastors.

Strategy 1: Provide two (2) training workshops. This will prepare and equip participants by providing foundational information on marriage and counseling strategies (Feb – April 2017, Site Team and Delroy Fredericks will do this).

Strategy 2: Questionnaire participants before and immediately after training for competency and confidence changes.

Strategy 3: Questionnaire participants 1, 3, and 6 months after to measure participant's changes in competency and confidence when working with crisis marriages (May, Aug and Nov 2017, Site team will do this).

Evaluation of Goal 4: A pre-test questionnaire will be administered to pastors to determine their competence and confidence level when dealing with distressed marriages. At least 90% of participants will indicate they do not feel confident and competent when dealing with couples in distress. A post-test questionnaire will be administered immediately after training to determine participants' new level of competence and

confidence when dealing with distressed marriages. At least 75% of participants will indicate that they feel better equipped to deal with marriages in distress. These participants will be given an opportunity to apply what was learned to future counseling sessions in their respective churches.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question One (Historical)

What is the cultural influence of marriage from Guyana to the United States and what strengths from the culture can be used to help marriages thrive?

This question recognizes that culture can influence a couple's marriage. Guyana is culturally diverse. According to 2002 census data, Guyana consists of East Indians (43.5%), African heritage (30.2%), Mixed Heritage (16.7%), Amerindians (9.2%), Whites (0.06%), Portuguese (0.20%) and Chinese (0.19%).²⁹ To effectively help distressed couples, pastors must understand the couples' cultural context. This question will explore marriages from a Guyanese cultural context to gain insights that can be helpful in this project.

Research Question Two (Methodological)

What kind of counseling is a typical pastor trained to provide and when should a referral be made?

This question will explore the best counseling methods to equip a typical pastor when dealing with distressed marriages before he or she makes a referral if necessary. This question will examine what a pastor should do from the initial meeting to the time of the referral if needed. The pastor, through counseling, can help distressed couples

²⁹ Sonkarley Tiatun Beanie, The Co-operative Republic of Guyana Population and Housing Census 2002 (Bureau of Statistics, 2007), 27.

understand God's desired for wholeness in their marriage. Distressed marriages are a result of brokenness between husbands and wives. The "one flesh" (Gen 2:24) is now divided. The pastor should be able to recognize marriage stressors and the impact of the broken marriage on the family. The equipped pastor can help instill hope and possibly restoration to the distressed marriage.

Research Question Three (Biblical/Theological)

What lessons can be learned from John chapter 8 about how Jesus dealt with marriage, divorce, adultery, forgiveness, conflict resolution and reconciliation?

God instituted marriage with "oneness" in mind since the two becomes "one flesh" (Gen 2:24). However, sin changed the dynamics of the marriage relationship. Brokenness, which produces conflicts in marriages, can come because of spiritual issues, communication issues, financial issues, sexual issues, abuse issues, health issues and personality issues. The woman depicted in John chapter 8 represents conflict in marriage. Jesus demonstrates what Epperly points out, "No person in a conflict situation is excluded from the possibility of reconciliation or from being an instrument of the divine."³⁰ Pastors should be able encourage distressed husband and wife that reconciliation is possible even when it seems impossible. Epperly continues, "Within every conflict situation, even the seeming dead end or impasse, divinely-given

³⁰ Bruce G. Epperly, "The God of Conflict and Reconciliation: Toward a Theology of Conflict Resolution," *Impact* 20, (1988 1988): 22-23. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 3, 2016).

possibilities or alternatives are present. God's dynamic presence is a challenge to explore the unexpected solutions and possibilities hidden within apparent chaos and unreconciled alienation.”³¹ This research question will draw on spiritual principles to help distressed marriages to be restored.

³¹ Ibid., 23.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process will be crucial in determining the success of my demonstration project. Since I am developing a marriage training program to equip pastors to be more confidence and competent when dealing with distressed couples, I will be using questionnaires and interviews for my methods of evaluation. The site team and I will develop and monitor these questionnaires and interviews.

At the first meeting, a pre-test questionnaire will be administered to determine participants' awareness of the state of marriage and their competence and confidence levels when dealing with distressed marriages. Data will be examined for the amount participants who do not feel confidence and competent in dealing with couples in crisis. At least 75% of participants will indicate that they are aware of the state of marriages but do not feel confident and competent when dealing with marriages in distress. These participants will determine the success of this program.

Questionnaires will be distributed to help gather information about areas that causes distress in marriage to gain insights as to what areas we can target for strengthening the training program. The top 5 areas that causes distress in marriage will be included in the training program. Interviews with pastors will be conducted to gain insights on strategies when dealing with distressed couples and to build referral network.

A clear vision of the direction and intention for my demonstration project will be presented to all participants. This will enable participants to know and understand the long term vision, the operational plans to accomplish the vision, and the specific steps needed to accomplish each activities in the demonstration project. At the first meeting, at least 50% of all invitees will satisfy the goal of identifying 20 - 25 pastors to participate in the demonstration project. Selection criteria for pastors will be based on availability and commitment levels to training program. Data on participants' levels will be collected from questionnaire. Pastors who indicate, "Very interested in attending workshops," will satisfy availability and commitment levels. Selection criterial for the team who will help develop Demonstration Project will be the similar to the selection criteria for the pastors.

The training curriculum that will be used in the workshops will contain detailed researched areas that causes distress in marriages, hope filled counseling strategies and a referral list of approved counselors and agencies. At least 50% of referral counselors and agencies must be within the NY area. At least 50% of training curriculum must be completed by Jan 2017 and 100% completion of training curriculum by Feb 2017.

The training workshops will help to prepare and equip pastors to give hope and restoration to distressed couples. A pre-test questionnaire will be administered to pastors to determine their competence and confidence levels when dealing with distressed marriages. At least 90% of participants will indicate they do not feel confident and competent when dealing with couples in distress. A post-test questionnaire will be administered immediately after training to determine participants' new levels of competence and confidence when dealing with distressed marriages. At least 75% of participants will indicate that they feel better equipped to deal with marriages in distress.

These participants will be given an opportunity to apply what was learned to future counseling sessions in their respective churches. 1, 3 and 6 months follow up questionnaires will be given to gauge new competency and confidence levels.

CHAPTER 6

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

The Process

The members of the Site Team communicated via email and phone to complete the evaluation of my ministerial competencies. A summary of the Site Team's and my assessments of ministerial competencies is as follows:

Theologian

Pastor Delroy has a comprehensive understanding of the scriptures and biblical truths. Additional biblical training will allow him to become more effective as a marriage counselor to help in the healing process of broken families.

Preacher/Interpreter of Sacred Texts

Pastor Delroy is a dynamic and well organized preacher of the word of God. He upholds biblical truths which is evident in his sermons. He can develop his knowledge and interpretation of the Bible in regards to the area of marriage.

Worship Leader

This competency is not applicable to Pastor Delroy.

Prophetic Agent

Pastor Delroy is compassionate and shows understanding of other's suffering. He is able to embrace his convictions from the word of God while showing empathy to

others in need. He will need to develop his understanding of different cultures and his understanding of the world from a global perspective.

Leader

Pastor Delroy is effective in his ability to lead others into their own encounter with God. He is able to give constructive criticism and his lifestyle draws others to God. He will develop his ability to effectively lead couples who have experienced brokenness back to God.

Religious Educator

Pastor Delroy demonstrates an ability to have open dialogue with others. He shows a distinct ability to train and supervise other religious educators. He will develop his knowledge and implement new resources to bring hurting couples back to the point of reconciliation.

Counselor

Pastor Delroy is an excellent listener and he demonstrates an ability to show empathy to others. He will seek to understand and implement counseling strategies to help hurting families. He will also develop the ability to recognize his own limitations and make appropriate referrals when necessary.

Pastor

Pastor Delroy is able to encourage newcomers and nurtures long-time members. He will improve his skills to extend “soul care” to families who are hurting. He will also learn and implement “self-care” strategies.

Spiritual Leader

Pastor Delroy is effective in leading spiritual retreats, meetings and services. He will develop his skills to guide married couples on the spiritual journey as they heal and overcome life challenges. He must be able to sense the working of the Holy Spirit and be able to convey hope to hurting couples.

Ecumenist

This competency is not applicable to pastor Delroy.

Witness or Evangelist

Pastor Delroy is always enthusiastic to confess and share the fundamentals of his faith with others. He will continue to share the good news about salvation in all areas of his life including during a counseling session with a married couple.

Administrator

This competency not needed for the development of pastor Delroy's demonstration project.

Professional

Pastor Delroy is open, honest and personable in his relationship with others. He has a positive attitude towards self and others. He will continue to develop his skills on how to constructively deal with conflict.

Pastoral Skills

Pastor Delroy is able to respect the physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries of others. He has the ability to assess the spiritual needs of the couples and minister effectively to them. He able to maintain appropriate boundaries and know when to seek assistance from others.

Interpersonal Skills

Pastor Delroy is able to respond to the needs of others and give feedback that will increase productivity and fosters growth. He has the ability to resolve conflicts in a pastoral and skillful manner and therefore needs to continue in this competency.

Faith Rooted Community Organizer

This competency is not applicable to Pastor Delroy.

Competencies Chosen for Development

With the help of my site team members, we have selected the following competencies that will be needed for the development of my demonstration project: “Counselor” and “Pastoral Skills.” We have also agreed that some aspects of other competencies can also be helpful in my project. For example, some aspects of the “Spiritual Leader” competency can help strengthen the “Pastoral Skills” competency. Some aspects of the “Interpersonal Skills” competency can help strengthen the “Counselor” competency. We do not believe that the “Faith-Rooted Community Organizer” competency is needed for the development of my project.

I Counselor: Goal is to become a more effective counselor.

I believe this competency is absolutely necessary for the development of my proposal and project. The handout states that “counseling is concerned with the work of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling.”³² In order to equip pastors, I must first demonstrate competence and confidence in helping distressed couples. I must be able to establish relationships as I demonstrate that I am an open and genuine person. This will help others towards their journey towards wholeness. I

³² Rev. Dr. Wanda M. Lundy, Site Team Handbook, (New York Theological Seminary, 2015), 27.

must be able to become more knowledgeable regarding human psychological development. I must also be able to recognize my limits as a counselor and be able to make appropriate referrals when necessary.

The “Interpersonal Skill” competency can help strengthen the “Counseling Skills” competency by enabling me to respond to the needs of others and give feedback that will increase productivity and fosters growth. This will enable me, in a pastoral and skillful manner, to help couples resolve conflicts.

Strategies:

- A. I will seek to enroll in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) courses.
- B. I will engage in the study of different counseling techniques.
- C. I will visit counseling seminars designed to help equip pastors.
- D. I will be applying counseling strategies to actual counseling sessions with distressed couples.
- E. I will go through at least one marriage enrichment program.

Evaluation:

Upon successful completion of the above strategies, I will be able to equip myself and pastors to “help others to sustain, to endure, and to work through difficulties or crises.”³³

I will be at least 50% more confident and competent when dealing with marriages in distress. Efficiency in this competency will help in the creation of my marriage training program.

II Pastoral Skills: Goal is to be able to assess the spiritual needs of distress couples and counsel effectively.

³³ Ibid.

As a pastor, I must be able to respect the emotional, physical and spiritual boundaries of others. I must have the ability to assess the spiritual needs of the couples and minister effectively to them. I must be able to maintain appropriate boundaries and know when to seek assistance from others. I must be able to respect diversity and differences.

The “Spiritual Leader” competency can help strengthen the “Pastor Skills” competency by enabling me to be able to sense the presence and working of the Holy Spirit within a family. I must also be able to convey to hurting couples that the power of the Holy Spirit is able to bring about change.

Strategies:

- A. I will be interviewing other pastors to gain insights on how to respond in crisis situations.
- B. I will be reading sources on how to improve my pastoral skills.
- C. I will look into attending pastoral counseling seminars.
- D. I will study specific scriptures dealing with pastoral and counseling skills.

Evaluation:

Upon successful completion of the above strategies, I will improve on my pastoral skills competency by at least 50%. This will help me, and the pastors I plan to equip, to demonstrate confidence and competent when dealing with distressed couples.

Appendix A: TIMELINE

Date	Task/Activity	Tools to complete task	Person responsible
11/2016	Proposal Approval by Director	2 copies of proposal	DF
11/2016	Meet with Advisor	Copy of approved DP	DF
	Meet with Site Team	Teleconference	DF
	Design Flyers for meeting with local pastors	Info for flyer	Designer
	Goal 1: Strategy 3 Use Social media	Facebook, etc.	DF
	Evaluation	Summations	DF
	Goal 2: Strategy 1,3 Develop selection criteria	Teleconference/Meeting	DF and Site Team
	Goal 2: Strategy 2,4 Identify pastors and Select team B for DP		DF and Site Team
12/2016	Goal 1: Strategy 1 Meet with pastors	Location; attendees	DF
	Goal 1: Strategy 2 Preach 2 Sermons		DF
11/2016-2/2017	Develop training curriculum	Research	DF, Site Team, Team B
	Referral list		Site Team
1/2017	Create workbook	Research	DF, Site Team, Team B
2/2017	Complete curriculum		
	Evaluation / Writing		DF
3/25/2017	Workshop # 1	Flyers	DF, Site Team, Team B, Designer
	Evaluation / Writing		DF
4/8/2017	Workshop # 2	Flyers	DF, Site Team, Team B, Designer
	Evaluation / Writing		DF
	Meet with Advisor	Notes; questions	DF
5/2017	Follow up questionnaire #1		Site Team
8/2017	Follow up questionnaire # 2		Site Team
	Meet with Advisor	Notes; draft materials; questions	DF
11/2017	Follow up questionnaire # 3		Site Team

	Evaluation / Writing		DF
	Full DP Draft		DF; Advisor; Site Team
12/2017	Re-write	To editor	DF
1/2018	Prelim. submission		DF
	OTHER TASKS		
	Competencies development		
	Clinical Pastoral Education		DF
	Pastoral Care/ Counseling Seminars		DF

Appendix B: TIMELINE / BUDGET

Date	Task/Activity	Tools to complete task	Cost / Funding
11/2016	Proposal Approval by Director	2 copies of proposal	
11/2016	Meet with Advisor	Copy of approved DP	
	Meet with Site Team	Teleconference/ Meeting	Donation
	Design Flyers for meeting with local pastors	Info for flyer	\$100.00
	Goal 1: Strategy 3 Use Social media	Facebook, etc.	
	Goal 2: Strategy 1,3 Develop selection criteria	Teleconference/ Meeting	Donation
	Goal 2: Strategy 2,4 Identify pastors and Select team B for DP		
12/2016	Goal 1: Strategy 1 Meet with pastors	Location; attendees	
	Goal 1: Strategy 2 Preach 2 Sermons		
	Referral list		
2/2017	Create workbook	Research	
	Complete workbook and curriculum	Print	\$500.00
3/25/2017	Workshop # 1	Flyers/Speaker	\$75.00/\$250.00
	Writing		
4/8/2017	Workshop # 2	Flyers/Speaker	\$75.00/\$250.00
	Writing		
5/2017	Follow up questionnaire #1		\$25.00
8/2017	Follow up questionnaire # 2		\$25.00
11/2017	Follow up questionnaire # 3		\$25.00
	Evaluation / Writing		
	Full DP Draft		
12/2017	Re-write	To editor	\$1200.00
1/2018	Prelim. submission		
	OTHER EXPENSES		
	Competencies development		
	Clinical Pastoral Education		\$1200.00

	Pastoral Care/ Counseling Seminars		\$500.00
		TOTAL ESTIMATED BUDGET	\$4850.00

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Appendix B Marriage Enrichment Manual

Marriage Enrichment Training Manual

HOW GOD CONQUERS



**Pastor's Guide to Helping
Couples with Confidence**

Prepared by:
**Pastor
Delroy Fredericks**
DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

Special Thanks
Site Team Members: Winnet Fredericks, LMSW
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Preface

This manual is a result of a deep desire to enable pastors to become a valuable and effective resource for couples whose marriages are in distress. Some pastors may not feel confident enough to help couples whose marriage are in distressed. Couples sometimes seek help from their pastors. Many pastors are placed on the “front lines” and can be of tremendous help if equipped. However, if the pastor does not seem confident and competent, a couple in distress may leave the meeting not feeling hopeful about their marriage. Some distressed couples may feel that there is little hope for their marriage. This marriage enrichment manual will provide pastors with the tools necessary to explore marriage stressors and inject hope into distressed marriages. Pastors will learn to provide immediate practical steps, implement ongoing solutions, and make necessary referrals to help couples to heal and avoid the many disasters associated with distressed marriages. The information provided will equip pastors to be more confident and competent when dealing with couples that are in distress.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This manual is designed to train pastors to help couples in their congregation who are going through marital difficulties. The content of this manual is biblically based and is intended for Christian pastors and Christian couples. However, anyone who desires a change for better, can benefit from this manual.

The content of this manual is grounded in biblical truth and is organized in three parts. Part I is an introduction to Hope Conquers Distress. This is a Marriage Enrichment Program and an introduction to the strategies used in Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling. This program will be using and developing a principle used in Dr. Everett Worthington's book Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling, A Guide to Brief Therapy. According to Worthington, counselors must promote love, faith and work to help distressed couple or individual through difficult problems. The strategy used by Worthington is, "faith working through love."¹ In addition, I will be including the need for "conviction" into this strategy and therefore I will be using "faith working through love from conviction."

Part II is the enrichment part of the training manual. This section will address common areas in marriage that every pastor should understand. The basic components of Hope Conquers Distress consist of twelve marriage enrichment target areas, and is based on the acronym, HOPECONQUERS. This program addresses: H- Healthy Beliefs and

¹ Everett L. Worthington, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy, expanded pbk. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, ©2005), 32

Values; O- Outlook on Marriage Vision; P- Peace through Confession and Forgiveness; E- Enriched Communication, C- Conflict Resolution, O- Obscured Thinking, N- Need to Cleave, Q- Quench Not Commitment, U- Unrelenting Problems, E- Effective Handling of Domestic Violence, R- Recovery from Addictions and Substance Abuse, and S- Survival from Chronic Affairs and Adultery.

Part III focuses on counseling stages and some strategies every pastor should be trained to use within each stage. The three stages that will be discussed are the “Encounter stage,” the “Engagement stage,” and the “Disengagement stage.”²

Recommendations and Guidelines for Program

Hope Conquer Distress Marriage Enrichment Program is designed to trained pastors to help couples who are in distress. This program is recommended for Christian pastors who believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God in accordance to 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and that a Christian marriage is a relationship between a male and a female (Gen 2:23-24).

Pastors should also strongly believe that marriage is a covenant, and not just a contract. Marriage vows must be taken seriously in accordance to Numbers 30:2, “If a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath of binding obligation on himself, he must not break his word, but must do whatever he has promised.”³

This program is geared towards helping pastors inject hope and move couples towards healing and reconciliation through the enriching portion of the program, and using some of the counseling strategies.

² David G. Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, ©2003), 74.

³ NET Bible version.

Participants and Registration

As pastors, your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Willing participants are often more motivated and engaged in research related activities. You have the right to withdraw at any time, or refuse to participate entirely. Any information will be stored in a protected manner so that it cannot be viewed by others. None of the information that identifies you will be made public or revealed to others.⁴ If you desire to withdraw, please notify the researcher, Delroy Fredericks, at scien7@juno.com.

This manual will be yours to keep after this workshop. Copying of this manual is strictly prohibited without written consent from the researcher. Duplicate copies can be ordered by contacting the researcher.

Registration is required for the purpose of gathering important information for this study. A pre-test questionnaire will be administered to participants to determine their awareness of the state of marriage and their competence, and confidence levels when dealing with couples who are in distress. A post-test questionnaire will be administered immediately after training to determine participants' new level of competence and confidence when dealing with couples who are in distress. These participants will be given an opportunity to apply what was learned to future counseling sessions in their respective churches. 1, 3 and 6 months follow up questionnaires will be given to gauge new competency and confidence levels.

⁴ Ernest T Stringer, *Action Research*. 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 2014), 89.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO HOPE CONQUERS DISTRESS

Hope is a critical component in every Christian life, and even more important for couples in distressed marriage. Hopelessness easily steps in when couples are in distress. Added to the hopelessness, is a plethora of other issues. Two most noticeable issues are, the effects of distress on the family and the couple's health.

When marriages are in distress, the viability of the family is threatened. Research has shown that distressed marriages affect the family negatively. Parenting skills becomes poorer. When parenting skills are poorer, children seem to adjust poorly to parents. The negative effects continue as conflicts between siblings escalates and parent-child conflicts increases. Children are affected more negatively from distressed marriages, and studies also show that behavioral problems increase.⁵ The negative effects on the family can be reversed when pastors are able to inject hope into the couples who are in distress marriages.

When marriages are in distress, couples' health is also at stake. Since healthy marriages helps to promote health and well-being, then distressed marriages can increase a person's risk of physical and psychological dysfunction. Studies show that distressed marriages correlated with increased cases of illnesses. These studies that were done, overwhelmingly suggest and increase in the following illnesses: cardiac disease, cancer,

⁵ Frank D. Fincham and Steven R. H. Beach, "CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE: Implications for Working with Couples," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50, (Feb 1999): 47.

and chronic pain.⁶ Distressed marriages are also linked to depression, eating disorders, increased physical and psychological abuse of partners, alcoholism, including episodic drinking, binge drinking, and out-of-home drinking.⁷ The negative effects on the health of the couple can be reversed as the marriage is restored.

Couples who are in distress can easily lose hope in their marriage, having no expectation of good or success for their marriage. These couples also sometimes believe that their marriage is not susceptible to cure or is incapable of redemption or improvement. Couples who are in distress can feel hopeless in their marriage. Couples can feel as though they have tried everything, and the harder each tried, the worst things got.

As Christians, it is important to understand that “Hope Conquers Distress.” Pastors must understand this, and help inject hope into couples who are in distress marriages and possibly open the door for reconciliation. Many pastors are placed on the “front lines” when couples who are in distress are seeking help. Pastors must be confident in knowing what to do when couples want to call it quit, when there are communication issues, forgiveness issues, or when there are clear signs of spousal abuse, or when a referral for medical or psychological help should be made. Added to this, pastors must also understand what the Bible teaches about divorce, conflict resolution and reconciliation. “Hope Conquers Distress: Marriage Enrichment Training Program” will

⁶ Karen B Schmaling, “Physical health and relationships,” *Clinical Handbook of Marriage and Couples Interventions*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc): 323-345.

⁷ Fincham and Beach, “CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE: Implications for Working with Couples”: 47

teach pastors in these areas and train them on how to inject hope and help couples see that reconciliation is possible in their distressed marriage. However, to inject hope, pastors must understand God's plan and purpose for marriage.

God's Plan and Purpose for Marriage

Marriage is a covenant, not just a contract, between a man and a woman (Gen 2:23-24, KJV). A covenant is stronger than a contract, in that, "the parties to a covenant obligated themselves to carry out their respective commitments under the penalty of divine retribution should they later attempt to avoid them."⁸ Distressed marriages, if not addressed, can lead to divorce.

Secular society today would prefer to see distressed couples divorce, rather than work towards reconciliation. Dockery points out:

The Bible emphasizes that God Himself intends marriage to be a lifelong covenant relationship between one man and one woman. God declares His hatred of divorce (Mal 2:16). Both the Lord and Paul appealed consistently to the creation ordinance of marriage for their teaching. The Bible nowhere demands or even recommends the divorce. Instead, forgiveness and reconciliation are urged (1 Cor 7:11). Any exceptions are given grudgingly, as a way of regulating sinful conditions. In short, the easy acceptability of modern divorce is foreign to the Bible."⁹

God's best desire for marriages is to see marriages thrive. The roles of the husband and the wife must be reinforced when the couples are in distress. The Bible teaches that the husband is the head (1 Cor 11:3 KJV). Headship is referring to position, and not inequality, since God is mentioned in the same verse as the head of Christ.¹⁰ The husband

⁸ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 299.

⁹ David S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 854-55.

¹⁰ Tony Evans, *Kingdom Marriage: Connecting God's Purpose with Your Pleasure* (Carol Stream Illinois: Focus on the Family, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 350.

should obey God and love, honor, and protect his wife as he would his own body (Eph. 5:23, 25, 28-29 KJV). The husband must understand what it means to live with his wife in an understanding way (1 Peter 3:7 KJV). Husbands and wives must learn what it means to submit to each other (Eph 5:21 KJV). The wife should obey God and also understand what it means to submit to her own husband “as to the Lord” (Eph. 5: 22, 24 KJV). As the roles of husbands and wives are reinforced, love will help restore the marriage.

The love that is needed, however, must be sacrificial. The same sacrificial love as Jesus loved us so much that he died for us. Research has shown that couples tend to have happier marriage when they are willing to sacrifice for one another and for the well-being of the marriage. Couples who are able to put aside personal needs and desires in order to satisfy the spouse’s needs and desires creates a strong bond between partners.¹¹ We see this principle clearly in Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV): “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Key Principles of Hope-Focused Approach to Counseling

According to Worthington, counselors or pastors must promote love, faith and work to help couple or individual through difficult problems. The strategy used by Worthington is “faith working through love.”¹² This strategy is used to promote and inject hope into distressed couples. However, I believe “conviction” is also need in this

¹¹ Jacobson, N. S., & Christensen, A. (1996). **Integrative couple therapy: Promoting acceptance and change**. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

¹² Everett L. Worthington, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy, expanded pbk. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, ©2005), 32

strategy and therefore I will be using “faith working through love from conviction.” The key principles that will be used in this training manual are, hope, faith, work, love, and conviction.

Hope and Faith

Biblical hope is rooted and grounded in your faith in God. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1, KJV). Christians are saved by faith with the hope of eternal life. The Bible teaches in Romans, “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Rom 8:24-25, NIKV). Biblical hope is “confidence expectation” in what God has promised. Faith and hope are complementary. Faith is grounded in the reality of the past; hope is looking to the reality of the future. Without faith, there is no hope, and without hope there is no true faith.¹³ Both faith and hope are required to restore couples who are in distress marriages.

Research has shown that hope is an essential aspect of the quality of marriage one has. C. R. Snyder defined hope as the “Mental willpower” plus “Waypower to meet goals.”¹⁴ Willpower is the driving or motivating force in hopeful thinking while Waypower is the mental plans on reaching a goal.¹⁵ If couples lose their desire or mental willpower and does not know of ways to meet their goal, they will lose hope.

¹³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-hope.html>

¹⁴ C.R. Snyder, *Psychology of Hope: You Can Get Here from There* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010), Location 224.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Location 171-199.

Worthington added to this equation a third element: “waitpower to change,” or the time between the current situation and the change desired. The new equation becomes:¹⁶

$$\text{Hope} = \text{Willpower to change} + \text{Waypower to change} + \text{Wait power even if change is not happening}$$

The idea conveyed is that couples must be willing (Love) to make their marriage better plus couples must have access to the ways in which to make the marriage better (Work) plus the faith in God to wait on their marriage to improve (Faith) while actively working to improve it. Wait power is the willingness to press on even though you don't see change. Adding conviction at the beginning of this equation can intensify the willingness to change, the desire to work, and increase the couple's faith to wait on God.

Love

The often-used portion of Scripture on love is found in 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.¹⁷

True love seeks the highest good for others. Couples must choose to love if they desire change in their marriage. According to Worthington, love is a willingness to value the other person and an unwillingness to devalue the other person.¹⁸ Couples who are in distress must consciously choose to value their spouse even when they do not feel like it.

¹⁶ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 30.

¹⁷ 1 Cor 13:4-7 (NIV)

¹⁸ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 33.

Couples must also consciously choose not to devalue their spouse even when they feel the urge to do so.

Work

James rightfully said, “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20 KJV). Couples must invest time and put in work in the marriage to make their marriage better. Work, in hope focus counseling, is a result of love and faith. The strategy Worthington uses is “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). He points out

Faith working through love is prescriptive for good marital relationships (as it is of all mutual discipleship relationships).
Weaknesses in love, faith, or work (or combination of the three) are seen as the general cause of marital problems.
Strengthening weakness in love, faith or work (or combinations) is seen as the general strategic solution to marital problems.¹⁹

This strategy is effective in helping couples. However, as Christians, I believe “conviction” is another very important element to this strategy. Weaknesses in conviction can be another cause of marital problems.

Hope Conquers Distress and Conviction

Hope Conquers Distress (HCD) stresses the need for conviction. Pastors must understand the meaning of conviction and convey this meaning to couples throughout the counseling sessions. The word convict is a translation of the Greek word *elencho*, which means “to convince someone of the truth; to reprove; to accuse, refute, or cross-examine a witness.” Conviction causes us to recognize a behavior that goes against a Biblical teaching, moral standard, or Christ-like characteristic that we have chosen to uphold. Couples who are in distress may say that they desire to change, or say that they want to work on their marriage, but lack conviction.

¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

True conviction is not a guilty conscience, shame over sinful behaviors, or merely knowledge of right and wrong. For a Christian, true conviction is when we become mindful of how much our sin dishonors God. When David was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he cried out, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4 KJV). When Joseph was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he said, "How could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9 KJV). If there is a desire for true lasting change to occur, it must come out of conviction, from deep within the hearts of both the husband and the wife.

It is out of true conviction the strategy, "Faith working through love from conviction" can guide the counseling session with couples who are in distress. Pastors must help couples see the need to be convicted by the Holy Spirit as they work on their marriage. Once a husband or wife is convicted by the Holy Spirit, the pastor can now assess areas for enrichment that need intervention.

Pastors can help bring about conviction by having the couple do the following "Get Honest" exercise, where the couple get honest with God, themselves and then each other.

Exercise 1: "Get honest with God"

1. Have both couples reflect on one area that is causing problems in the marriage.
2. Have each partner pray a prayer like this, "Heavenly father, I am having tremendous difficulties in my marriage. Lord, I want you to show me, me. This is where I think I have fallen short but I want you to show me where else I have fallen short in this marriage." [When God shows you, write it down] Confess, repent, and ask forgiveness. Then say, "Help me to change God because my sin is

dishonoring you. When I am doing this to my spouse (list what God shows you), I am sinning against you God. Thank you for showing me, me. My desire is to change so that my marriage and family will be better, so that I can experience your peace, love, joy as I work on my marriage. I want to change because I love you and want to be more like you God.”

3. Have each partner write out the list for the pastor to review. True conviction should reveal some similarities in the issues causing distress.

CHAPTER 3

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT AREAS FOR COUPLES

Introduction

This section will address common areas in marriage that every pastor should understand. The basic components of Hope Conquers Distress consist of twelve marriage enrichment target areas, and is based on the acronym, HOPECONQUERS. This program addresses: H- Healthy Beliefs and Values; O- Outlook on Marriage Vision; P- Peace through Confession and Forgiveness; E- Enriched Communication, C- Conflict Resolution, O- Obscured Thinking, N- Need to Cleave, Q- Quench Not Commitment, U- Unrelenting Problems, E- Effective Handling of Domestic Violence, R- Recovery from Addictions and Substance Abuse, and S- Survival from Chronic Affairs and Adultery. These twelve components will help the pastor assess the area or areas that need intervention. A brief description of each will be given in this section.

Healthy Beliefs and Values

Values and beliefs are related but different. Values refer to a set of ideas that guide an individual on how to evaluate right versus wrong. Beliefs are those things such as a set of doctrines, statements or experiences a person holds as true. Healthy beliefs and values are very important in marriage because everything a husband or wife does in marriage is based on their values and beliefs. Values often comes from what one believes to be true.

Healthy Christian beliefs are based on the Bible. The Bible teaches that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1 KJV), God created man and woman in His image (Gen 1:27 KJV), God is sovereign ruler and involved in everyone's life (Ps 47:2 KJV), God ordained and honors marriage (Heb 13:4 KJV), God created us to honor and glorify Him (Is 43:7 KJV), the Scriptures are infallible, inerrant, and the sole and final authority for all matters of faith and conduct (2 Timothy 3:16; Cor. 2:13 KJV), the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and that He is an abiding helper, teacher, and guide (John 6:13, 14:16-17 and 16:8-11 KJV) and with God all things are possible (Matt 19:26 KJV).

Since values comes from beliefs, if you believe everything above to be true then, you will value living in a way that honors God, you will value you spouse because they are created in the image of God, you will value your marriage because God ordained it, you will value any help to make your marriage better because you believe with God all things are possible. Pastors must help distressed couples explore this area as this area will also determine their convictions to honor God.

Using what the Bible teaches and asking in question form can help gauge where couples are. For example, "Do you believe that God created the heavens, the earth and man and woman in His image?" "Do you believe that God is the sovereign ruler and involved in everyone's life?" "Do you believe God ordains and honors marriages?" "Do you believe that with God all things are possible?"

Pastors can do the following exercise with couples. **Exercise 2.**

- 1) Do you believe God created your spouse in His image and anointed and appointed him/her for His glory?

2) Write down a name you believe God sees your spouse as. Example:

Marvelously and wonderfully made woman of God; Called man of God; Chosen woman of God; Anointed man of God.

3) Start thinking of and calling your spouse by his/her new name

Pastors can also give couples the following questionnaire,²⁰ **Exercise 3**, to access marriage relevant values.

²⁰ Ibid., 106.

Exercise 3.

For each issue below, rate how important it is to you *right now* using the following scale:

CEN = One of the most central or important issues to me.

IMP = Very important but not as essential as the central issues.

MOD = Of moderate importance to me.

LIT = Of little importance to me.

NO = Of no importance to me.

1. My religious beliefs	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
2. Money and things money can buy	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
3. Having a common vision for our marriage	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
4. Agreeing on important values	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
5. Being able to forgive each other when we've been hurt	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
6. Being able to admit to each other when we are wrong	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
7. Spending time together	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
8. Sharing a sense of being emotionally bonded	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
9. Having a sense that we are about intellectually equal	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
10. Sharing common interests in leisure	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
11. Sexual satisfaction	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
12. Shared social activities	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
13. Expressing positive emotions	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
14. Expressing negative emotions	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
15. Keeping each other posted about little things that have happened throughout the day	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
16. Not arguing	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
17. Being able to resolve differences	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
18. Not hurting each other when we disagree	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
19. Not blaming each other for things that go wrong	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
20. Holding basically the same expectations	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
21. Fidelity	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
22. Keeping our word to each other	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
23. Being dedicated to each other for life	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
24. Being self-controlled	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
25. Time with friends	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO
26. Commitment to my job or career	CEN	IMP	MOD	LIT	NO

Figure 1.

Outlook on Marriage Vision

A clear vision of the marriage is needed for success. However, the outlook of the marriage vision is sometimes blurred when couples are in distress. Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) reminds us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." For every couple, there are three parts to the core vision for their marriage: the concept of the actual marriage (the way the person perceives the marriage), the true marriage (the way the marriage really

is), and the way a person thinks the marriage should be (what they envision an ideal marriage to be).²¹ Couples must be able to have a vision for their marriage even when the marriage is in distress.

Pastor must help couples formulate a vision statement. This can be done following these steps:²² **Exercise 4.**

- 1) Visualize yourself ten years from now and talk about where you would like to be and what you would like your marriage to look like.
- 2) Prepare a 10-year time line chart.
- 3) List any obstacles you might encounter as you try to implement this plan.
- 4) Think of ways that you might overcome each obstacle.
- 5) Write how you would feel 10 years from now if you achieved this plan.

The idea behind the marriage vision is bring about a sense of being excited and proud about your marriage. In distressed marriages, this exercise can sometimes cause additional conflict, thus, couples can be encouraged to write separate vision statements.²³

One helpful assignment, **Exercise 5**, that may assist couples to start the process of writing the vision statement is by answering what is called a “Miracle Question.” Both husband and wife are encouraged to answer the following question, “If things were perfect between the two of you, what would be different than what exists right now?”²⁴ Counselor should assist the couple in clarifying his or her response by asking the

²¹ Ibid., 61.

²² Ibid., 122.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 115.

following questions.²⁵ “What else would be different when this miracle takes place?”
“Tell me more about that.” What will you be doing differently when you are (doing the miracle)?” “What will you be doing differently when you are not (doing the problem)?”

Help couples to answer in positive ways as opposed to negative ways. For example, instead of saying, “We wouldn’t argue as much,” help couples say, “We would talk more pleasantly to each other.” The answer to this question becomes the goal that is focused on for the duration of the sessions and can help clarify the core vision of the marriage.

Peace through Confession and Forgiveness

The Bible declares, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom 12:18). The dictionary defines peace as, “freedom from disturbance; quiet and tranquility.” This is seldom experienced by couples whose marriage is in distress. One way that pastors can help couples to experience peace is through confession and forgiveness.

Confession and forgiveness are important in marital reconciliation. In all fairness, both are difficult but “without forgiveness, commitment will unravel and the marriage will come apart” since “forgiveness is the glue that holds commitment together.”²⁶ The Bible teaches that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Confession is to recognize one’s own wrong doing and the decision to change course by doing what is right.

²⁵ Charles Allen Kollar, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back On Track*, updated and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 1.

²⁶ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 128.

There are three general responses²⁷ when a spouse wants to address an issue with the other spouse: denial- I did not do anything wrong (conflict); justification- Yes, I did something wrong but I was right in doing wrong; excuse- reason (reason could be reasonable) but must come after if couples would like to reduce conflict.

The process of seeking forgiveness if you have hurt your spouse is by using this acronym, CONFESS.²⁸ **Exercise 6.**

C: Confess without excuse (Hun, I was wrong to curse you out)

O: Offer apology (convey sincere regret and contrition) (I'm sorry for cursing you out)

N: Note his or her pain (empathically show that you understand the pain or anger you caused) (I see that I really hurt you when I cursed you out)

F: Forever Value (say that you value the person) (I really care for you, I messed up and I didn't intend to hurt you)

E: Equalize (Offer to make some restitution: Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?)

S: Swear never to do it again (I'll never do this again)

S: Seek forgiveness (Can you forgive me for what I did?) Now you can ask your spouse if he or she would like to know the reason why you did what you did.

You cannot seek forgiveness if you do not first confess. Confession is critical for healing distressed marriage because the hardness of the heart must be softened before forgiveness can penetrate the heart. After confession, it is up to the other spouse to

²⁷ Light University, Marriage Works: Enriching Your Marriage and Encouraging Others, 309.

²⁸Ibid.

forgive or to harden the heart.²⁹ However, I have noticed that the spouse who is hurting is sometimes hesitant to forgive and the spouse who has done the hurting pushes for the spouse forgive and move on. A misunderstanding of forgiveness can lead to situations like this. Pastors must help clear up common misunderstandings of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not based on what is fair. Rom 5:8 (NET) states “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” It was not fair for Jesus to die for us, but he chose to do so by an act of the will. Forgiveness is an act of the will. It’s not based on feelings or circumstances. It is a choice.

Forgiveness is not just excusing or condoning (declaring that the act was not wrong) unacceptable behavior. Inacceptable behavior is without excuse. In forgiveness, a person admits that the act was wrong but chooses to forgive anyway. The person chooses to forgive, not because they are weak or like a doormat, but because they are strong enough to be like Christ.

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. It takes one to forgive but two to reconcile. One might fully forgive and choose not to reconcile if reconciliation would put you in harms’ way. You may forgive a physically abusive spouse, but if he or she is unrepentant and do not seek help for change, you may choose not to reconcile. In a marriage, forgiveness and reconciliation are needed to produce strong lasting marriages.

Pastors can help guide couples through the process of forgiveness by following these steps:³⁰ 1) remind couples that their goal is reconciliation of the marriage; 2) help

²⁹ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 63.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

them experience the pain, write it out if necessary; 3) help both husband and wife empathize (being able to feel as the other feels and think as the other thinks); 4) help each person reflect on his or her own capability of inflicting hurt; 5) help each person recall times that he or she has been forgiven (you can start with Christ but end with a natural person in their life); 6) provide an opportunity for each person to say aloud that he or she forgives their spouse; 7) discuss the maintenance of forgiveness (when it still hurts, or dwelling on hurt, new resentments, the need to release the spouse to God).

Confession and forgiveness pave the way for reconciliation. Reconciliation can be more complex since it also involves a mutual effort to behave with trustworthiness prior to the achievement of reconciliation.³¹ Both the husband and wife need to become experts in both confession and forgiveness. For reconciliation to take place, both partners must acknowledge when they feel hurt but put aside bitterness, revenge and a desire for separation. Forgiveness is a free-gift to the one who has broken trust. Reconciliation is restored relationship based on restored trust. Forgiveness is extended even if never earned, reconciliation is offered to the offender because it has been earned; the other person has done what is necessary to restore the trust.

There are many godly benefits to forgiveness. Forgiveness unleashes God's blessings on your life. Un-forgiveness can block God's blessings on your life. The Bible teaches, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you" (Matt 6: 14-15 KJV).

³¹ Ibid. 63

Forgiveness frees you from bitterness and anger. An unforgiving person may be a bitter person. They may be judgmental (focusing on the other person's wrong), critical and always waiting to rejoice when something goes wrong. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you," (Heb 12:14-15 KJV).

Forgiveness is of God and causes us to walk in the light. God is pleased when we forgive. Just like the master was angry when the servant did not want to forgive in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:21-35 KJV), God feels the same about us when we do not forgive each other. Lastly, a forgiving person's heart is joyful and full of love.

Enriched Communication

"Communication is the lifeblood of marriage."³² It is no surprise that many couples who are in distress marriages have major communication issues. Communication is not just the words used, it also includes nonverbal behavior and tone. Nonverbal behavior must be carefully addressed in communication in couples who are in distress. This is not surprising after noting the statistics: "nonverbal communication accounts for 58 percent of the total message. Tone of voice makes up 35 percent of the message. The actual words you say account for only 7 percent of the total message."³³ This area causes

³² Les Parrott and Leslie L. Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before--and After--your Marriage*, newly expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 79.

³³ Ibid., 84.

many problems in marriages because one partner may say “yes” with a tone that says “no.”

Speaking the “truth in love” (Eph 4:15) is one very effective way to build communication between couples. Speaking the truth in love builds healthy family relationships. Since love, based on 1 Cor 13:4-7) is seeking the highest good of the other person, speaking the truth in love does the same. Truth may vent the facts, (your breath stinks) but when balanced with love, (you know what, I want to share something with you that I am not sure if you are aware of, I have observed on a couple occasion that your breath smells a little funny, so I wanted to let you know so maybe you can get it checked out by a dentist), can make communication better.

Couples can carelessly not communicate truth when one partner uses words like “never and always.” You may have heard these phrases before; A wife may say, “You never listen to me,” or a husband may say, “You always put me down.” It may be true that at times in the past or presently the husband may not be listening or the wife may have put down her husband, but if there was at least one time that the husband did listen or the wife did not put down her husband, then that statement is not true.

The goal of communication is to build up so that each spouse “will grow” (Eph. 4:15). Communicating truth in love gives the spouse an opportunity to change for the better. Couples must learn the principle of “Leveling and Editing.”³⁴ Leveling is speaking the truth in love. Couples should level when a spouse feels isolated or bored. Couples should not level when one spouse feels angry, often argues or puts down or insults the spouse.

³⁴ Worthington, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy, 160.

Editing is simply not saying hurtful or negative comments to a spouse. Pastors must help couples understand not everything one thinks, one should say. A reminder of James is very helpful here, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19 KJV).

Communicating through love languages

According to John Gottman’s research³⁵, a 5 to 1 ratio of positive to negative interactions predicts a good marriage. Anything lower than 5 to 1 predicts poor marriage. A simple solution to maintaining a positive marital environment is to increase the positive interactions and decrease the negative interactions. Couples can use Gary Chapman’s “Love Languages”³⁶ to attempt to establish a ratio of at least 5:1.

Chapman points out that couples sometimes communicate love differently from the way love is perceived. The goal is to communicate love in ways our spouse receive rather than the ways that we prefer to show them love. Generally, people show love in the way they wish to receive love. The five love languages are as follows:

Words of Affirmation (1 Cor 8:1)- Saying “I love you, you are an amazing husband [wife] or you look beautiful,” are all examples of sincerely admiring or praising your partner, sincerely complementing your partner and expressing your positive feelings in words.

³⁵ Light University, *Marriage Works: Enriching Your Marriage and Encouraging Others*, 306.

³⁶ Gary D. Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2015), 1.

Acts of Service (1 John 3:18)- Doing nice things for the other spouse. For example, cleaning the house. If this is one of the love language of a wife, she will feel valued and loved when her husband helps out around the home.

Gifts (John 3:16)- Giving gifts to others. The gift does not have to be big, but the thought of giving a gift makes the person with this love language feel loved.

Physical Touch or closeness (Mark 10:13-16)- People with this love language like when they are touched. It can be patting, rubbing, head rubs, back rubs, foot tickles etc. Being near to each other or putting an arm around the other, make the person with this love language feel loved.

Quality Time (Mark 3:14)- A person with this love language feels most loved when they are hanging out together and spending exclusive time together with their spouse. Pastors can help couples explore love languages by doing the following exercise.

Exercise 7. 1) Write down your love language and guess your spouse's love language by priority. List highest first.

Me	My Spouse
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

- 2) Check with spouse and make corrections if necessary.
- 3) Make a list of 10 loving actions that you could do to show love to your spouse.
- 4) Do the loving actions regularly.

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts in every relationship are inevitable. Pastors must help couples deal with conflict in ways that values each other and does not devalue each other. Conflicts can arise for different reasons. When people differ, pastors must help them to resolve some of the differences, accept some of the differences, and deal with the differences in love.³⁷

Personality differences can sometimes create conflicts. Men and women are different and to make a marriage work and reduce conflicts, these differences must be recognized and appreciated. Men focus on achievements; woman focus on relationships. Men focus on future goals and needs to believe in the practical value of that goal. Women focus on feelings and activities of the present.³⁸ Pastors can recognize if this area is a source of conflict by having the couples complete the “Personality Characteristics” exercise below:³⁹

³⁷ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 169.

³⁸ Parrott & Parrott, *Saving your Marriage Before it Starts*, 104.

³⁹ Ronald E. Hawkins, *Strengthening Marital Intimacy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 91-92.

Exercise 8. Read over the following list of personality characteristics and rate yourself in terms of what you are like, then what your spouse is like: (MLM- most like me; MLS- most like spouse; E- equal).

___ Dominant (argues one point of view)	vs. ___ Passive (let others have their way most of the time)
___ Risk taker	vs. ___ Conservative
___ Confident	vs. ___ Unsure of Self
___ Structures/organized	vs. ___ Disorganized
___ Social	vs. ___ Reserved (not comfortable with lots of people)
___ Nurturer/ Affectionate and warm	vs. ___ Aloof
___ Accepts positive attention from others	vs. ___ Reluctant to accept attention from others
___ Give others their way	vs. ___ Take charge and demand your own way
___ Trust people	vs. ___ Suspicious of people
___ Carefree	vs. ___ Anxious
___ Speak your mind	vs. ___ Guard your tongue
___ Relaxed	vs. ___ Tense
___ Rulebound	vs. ___ Spontaneous
___ Critical	vs. ___ Praising

How many opposites between you and your mate did you identify while filling out the above list? List them. How many similarities did you identify? List them. Ask your mate to tell you how he or she thinks each of these differences can strengthen or hurt your relationship as a couple. Use the following format.

Characteristic _____ Hurt _____ Strengthen _____

Characteristic _____ Hurt _____ Strengthen _____

Characteristic _____ Hurt _____ Strengthen _____

Do you think your personality can be changed? Each answer. If you think your personality can be changed, how would you tackle the process of change?

The follow additional strategies are aimed to help couples deal with conflict in their marriage. First, it is very important for couples to seek God for wisdom and guidance first to deal with conflicts in their relationship.

The first strategy is to be mindful of how we say things and always tell the truth. It can be the difference between a regular conversation and a fight. Communicating truth in love, as discussed earlier, can help reduce conflicts. Communication issues sometimes increase conflicts between couples. Communication involves both speaking and listening. One researcher observed that “most people think they listen, but don’t really hear each other.”⁴⁰

To help couples listen better pastor can use the “Lister- Talker Card” exercise. Petersen, through his research, realized that the roles of talking and listening were substantially different. The card reminds us to listen first and talk second and “forces us to observe the roles we play.”⁴¹ The Talker side of the card states: I’m most bothered. I own the problem. It describes the goals of talking as: to share my feelings and to share my thoughts. Then it reminds the talker to talk without accusing, attacking, judging labeling. The Listener side of the card states: I’m calm enough to hear. I don’t own the problem. The goals of the listener are: to provide safety, to understand, and to clarify. Then it reminds the listener to listen without agreeing, disagreeing, advising, or defending.

⁴⁰ James C. Petersen L.P.C. D.Min, *Why Don't We Listen Better? Communicating and Connecting in Relationships* by James C. Petersen L.p.c. D.min (2007-01-08) (Tigard, OR: Petersen Publications, 1660), 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

The second strategy is to never let the sun go down while you are still angry (Eph 4:26 KJV). It is near to impossible to resolve every conflict before bedtime, but it is vitally important to resolve them as quickly as possible. Couples should be careful not to pursue the other spouse when there are clear signs of disengagement or if there will be increased conflict. Proverbs 30:33 (NLT) says, “As the beating of cream yields butter and striking the nose causes bleeding, so stirring up anger causes quarrels.” Sometimes, it is best to put the issue aside and address it at another time.

The third strategy is to be kind and forgiving to one another (Ephesians 4:32 KJV). Pastors must guide couples through the process of forgiveness as discussed previously. Conflict resolution also involves reconciliation of the couples. Reconciliation includes confession of one’s hurtfulness and forgiveness of the other person’s hurtfulness.

The last strategy is to not criticize each other when conflicts arise. Some couples do not recognize that there is a difference between complaining and criticizing. Complaining usually begins with the word I, and criticism with the word you.⁴²

Pastors can also guide couples through a current conflict situation by letting them go through the “Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict.”⁴³ This exercise can be used to help couples take a closer look at how conflicts can be resolved, while remaining respectful to each other.

⁴² Parrott & Parrott, *Saving your Marriage Before it Starts*, (2006), 123.

⁴³ Couples Checkup, www.couplecheckup.com

Exercise 9: TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show the amount of disagreements are not related to marital happiness as much as how they are handled. Happy couples do not avoid disagreements; they resolve them while remaining respectful of each other, thereby strengthening their relationship. This Ten Step Model is a simple, but effective way to resolve conflict while avoiding the common and destructive patterns. Use this model with an ongoing issue in your relationship, as well as future issues.

1. Set a time and place for discussion.
2. Define the problem - Be specific. _____

3. List the ways you each contribute to the problem.
Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.
1) _____

2) _____

5. Brainstorm—Pool your new ideas and try to list 10 possible solutions to the problem. Do not judge or criticize any of the suggestions at this point.
1) _____ 6) _____
2) _____ 7) _____
3) _____ 8) _____
4) _____ 9) _____
5) _____ 10) _____
6. Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions. (Be as objective as possible. Talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for resolving issue.)
7. Agree on one solution to try _____
8. Agree how you will each work toward this solution. (Be as specific as possible.)
Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

9. Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.
Place: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____
10. Reward each other for progress. (If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Couples Check up

Obscured Thinking

The Bible states, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7). In marriage, what one person thinks about themselves, their spouse, and the relationship, can sometimes determine if the marriage will survive. What we think controls how we act, how we communicate, how we treat our spouse and how we view our marriage. Obscured and negative thinking in marriage, can turn a good relationship to a bad relationship.

Negative thinking in marriage develops when conflict and anger build up over time. Negative thinking changes the couple’s perception of their marriage and in the process, devalues the spouse. One spouse may begin seeing the intentions and motives of the other spouse as bad. Even when things aren’t as bad as they seem, one spouse may be convinced that something is wrong with the other spouse. Then, what psychologist calls, “Confirmation Bias”⁴⁵ steps in. This is selective perception that emphasizes all that is bad and ignores that which is good (or vice-versa).

The following example will show how negative thinking changes our emotions. You can think yourself sad, you can think yourself angry or you can think yourself pleasant. Let us say you are in a heated argument with your spouse, emotions running high, then the phone rings. It is a call you are expecting and must take. You decide to walk away, pick up the phone and calmly say, “Hello” as you think, “I need to be calm and pleasant in answering the phone.” Soon after, you hang up the phone, you start thinking back on the situation that got you heated before.

This example points out that different thoughts produced different emotions and behaviors. If this is true, and I believe this to be true, then the key to transformation of

⁴⁵ Light University, Marriage Works: Enriching Your Marriage and Encouraging Others, 45.

self and the marriage begins by changing negative thinking to positive thinking. Positive thinking will change negative emotions and negative behaviors in a marriage.

Using the strategy of faith working through love from conviction, pastors can help couples recognize and change negative thoughts and replace them with thoughts about how each should value and love each other. Pastors must help couples avoid blaming each other by getting them to think of being responsible for their own behavior and how they can improve it.⁴⁶ As couple change focus to living by faith and working through love from conviction, change will begin to come to the marriage.

The Bible states in Philippians 4:8 (AMP), “Finally, believers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable and worthy of respect, whatever is right and confirmed by God’s word, whatever is pure and wholesome, whatever is lovely and brings peace, whatever is admirable and of good repute; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think continually on these things [center your mind on them, and implant them in your heart].” Since the goal is to reduce negative thinking that devalues and replace them with positive thinking that values each other, a pastor can help the couple by having them answer the questions on the following exercise from Phil 4:8.

⁴⁶ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 169.

Exercise 10.

1. Whatever is true about your spouse? Pastor should help couple think of their spouse as a child of God.
2. Whatever is honorable and worthy of respect? Pastor should help couple think of your spouse as a treasure and treat him or her as a treasure. The idea is for the couple to have a treasuring attitude toward each other.
3. Whatever is lovely and brings peace? Pastor should help couple think about the good times they had together. Take it back to wedding day if needed. Think about ways to bring about peace. Pastor should help couple understand that it is okay to give their spouse the “benefit of the doubt” and stop the tendency to assume the worst about their spouse.
4. Whatever is admirable and of good report? Let the couple write down a list of admirable things about their spouse and think on them. Also, by faith, write down some things they do not see but would like to see.
5. Finally, if there is anything worthy of praise? Have the couple write it down and think on these things.

This exercise can be the starting point in helping change the couple’s negative thinking into more positive thinking. This new thinking will help couples grow closer to each other.

Need to Cleave

Gen 2:24 states, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” The purpose for marriage is to fulfil God's covenant while keeping “oneness” as the goal for marriage. The goal of oneness helps to bring about closeness in marriage.

The three aspects of oneness are as follows; oneness in body (physical union-sexual intimacy in marriage), oneness in mind (To understand the mind of your spouse means you are attempting to understand their thoughts, plans, purpose and perspectives), and oneness in soul⁴⁷ (the soul is purified and protected by the truth and the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:22)⁴⁸).

When couples truly cleave to each other, closeness is the result. According to Worthington, “closeness is composed of a balance of distance, coaction and intimacy.”⁴⁹ Distance means that the husband or wife choses to perform activities alone. For example, studying, listening to music with headset or reading. Coaction includes performing activities with someone else, platonically.⁵⁰ For example, the wife may go shopping with a girlfriend or the husband may go bike riding with his buddies. Coaction is performing activities together. For example, going to dinner as a couple, doing the laundry as a couple, or playing game together. Intimacy includes activities that produces “oneness.”

⁴⁷ The human soul is the part of a person that is not physical. It is the part of every human being that lasts eternally after the body experiences death. The human soul is created by God (Jeremiah 38:16), it can be lost or saved (James 1:21; Ezekiel 18:4).

⁴⁸ Peter puts it this way, you can “purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

⁴⁹ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 68.

⁵⁰ Without any sexual inclinations.

For example, sexual intimacy, sharing deep secrets to each other, sharing feelings and thoughts.

Pastors must help couples build their level of closeness with each other. The CLEAVE⁵¹ exercise can help couples build closeness and is a combination of some of the previous exercises. **Exercise 11.**

C: Change actions to positive- The Love Language exercise can be helpful here. Pastors must encourage couples to make a list of 10 loving actions to show love to their spouse and do them regularly. The idea is to maintain a 5:1 positive to negative ratio by increasing the positives and reducing the negatives.

L: Loving Romance- Couples are encouraged to reflect on how they showed romance when things were going well and attempt to show romance again.

E: Employ a calendar- Couples should adjust levels of distance, coaction, and intimacy by using a calendar to schedule activities. If coaction is the issue, then rearrange calendar to meet that need.

A: Adjust intimacy elsewhere- Sometimes needs, not sexual, can be met outside the marriage if one partner does not have the same need level. For example, couples can share thoughts and plans with a close friend or have a prayer partner if those needs are conflicting with spouse's needs.

V: Value your partner- When a husband or wife feels valued, they generally feel closer to the one who is valuing them.

E: Enjoy yourselves sexually- Sex is good and should be enjoyed by both the husband and the wife. Learn to communicate with each other on how to be better lovers. Ask your

⁵¹Ibid., 219.

spouse, “Tell me how I can better please you,” or “Show me how I can better please you.”

Sexual intimacy can sometimes bring issues when couples are in distress. Pastor can help couples to change through conviction by sharing, “Twelve Biblical Principles for Heightening Sexual Intimacy”⁵² as follows.

Principle One: Genesis 2:24-25. God made man and woman sexual beings and pronounced his entire creation good. It would be a mistake to think that sex or sexual feelings were bad.

Principle Two: Song of Solomon 2:7; Proverbs 5: 1-23; Proverbs 23:1-8. It is not God's will that you somehow consign the sexual dimensions of your personhood to extinction. As with other appetites you must assume personal responsibility for control. Control, not extinction, is his plan.

Principle Three: Song of Solomon 8:6. The only legitimate satisfaction of the sexual appetite is within covenantal commitment. This covenantal commitment is marriage and derives its legitimacy from its pledge to honor social and spiritual sanctions.

Principle Four: Hebrews 13:4. Sex within the covenantal context and under control is not just good, it is holy.

Principle Five: Romans 1:21-28. Some sexual relationships represent a form of idolatry fashioned in the midst of personal fear and rebellion.

Principle Six: Proverbs 5:18, 19. The sexual appetite was not just placed in humans to assure procreation. It was God's intent that it also be the source of intense pleasure for his children.

Principle Seven: Genesis 4:1. Sexual intercourse is more than a physical act. It is a very special kind of knowing that implies deep communion, sharing, and total self-giving.

Principle Eight: Song of Solomon 4:12; 1Thessalonians 4: 1-7; Proverbs 5:15-23; Ecclesiastes 6:9; 1 Peter 1:13-16. Sex, because of its intense nature, cannot bring ultimate joy to the participants without a complete commitment from both partners to the exclusiveness that monogamy guarantees. The absence of fidelity to one partner till death parts is a violation of divine law and produces internal rage in the person being victimized by the infidelity. Even sexual fantasy divorced from the covenantal mate can diminish the joy of sex derived from monogamous coupling.

⁵² Ronald E. Hawkins, *Strengthening Marital Intimacy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 105.

Principle Nine: 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. Sexual intercourse is a part of the marital relationship that is absolutely necessary for the production of genuine and full unity in marriage. Only in cases where it is made impossible by other compelling reasons should its absence from marriage relationships be viewed as acceptable. In these cases, both partners should understand the reasons for its absence or for their willing consent to its absence.

Principle Ten: 1 Corinthians 7: 1-5. Sex should be viewed not only as a way of getting one's needs met but primarily as a way of serving one's mate. Refusal to meet a mate's sexual needs in a wholesome and healthy manner is a sin.

Principle Eleven: 1 Corinthians 7: 1-5. Sex is a reciprocal right based on the reality that your body belongs to your mate. This scriptural teaching is not intended to be a license for spouse abuse but rather to emphasize the joy that spouses derive from serving one another in a satisfying and healthy sexual manner. In such a setting, sex is personal and holy, a complex meeting of both mates' feelings, thoughts, and sensations.

Principle Twelve: Genesis 2:18-25. Sex is fully satisfying only when two persons possessed of expanding individual identities come to the experience. Each one comes prepared to give and demand. Each one remains intermittently independent and dependent. Both fill the void in the other and discover in the filling a developing fullness in themselves.⁵³

These principles can help couples to see the importance of sexual intimacy in marriage.

Sex can be viewed as the “life-uniting act” that glues two people together in a way that changes their lives forever, and for that reason, sex can increase closeness in a marriage.⁵⁴ Couples can benefit from clearer understanding of God’s design for sexual intimacy in marriage.

⁵³ Hawkins’s 12 principles.

⁵⁴ Stanton L. Jones and Brenna B. Jones, *How and When to Tell Your Kids About Sex: A Lifelong Approach to Shaping Your Child's Sexual Character*, rev. & updated. ed. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2007), 130.

Quench Not Commitment

Commitment is another critical component to marriage. A Christian marriage is a covenant, not just a contract. Both are forms of commitment. Worthington points out,

Contractual commitment depends on reciprocity or exchange.... Contractual commitment is built on mutual need fulfillment and breeds mutual dependency. When needs are not fulfilled, though, contractual commitment can erode.⁵⁵

Covenantal commitment is based the biblical principle that marriage is a union of man and woman before God. Matthew points this out when Jesus said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:4-6 NJKV).

Covenants are stronger binding than contracts. Pastors must help couples recognize that God blesses and treasures those who keep his covenant. Moses points this out in Exodus 19:5 NKJV when God said, "if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people." The same is true with God and his marriage covenant.

Pastors should also encourage commitment in other areas as well. Commitment to trying to change, commitment to attending counseling and applying the strategies or suggestions. The pastor must also realize that commitment cannot be coerced since people do not respond well to coercion.⁵⁶ Once the couple begins to quench commitment, the marriage may not survive because divorce becomes an option.

⁵⁵ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 69.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

The biggest threat to commitment is divorce. According to Banks research, the Christian divorce rate is higher than of 42%.⁵⁷ Complicating issue such as abuse, physiological issues and addiction can aide to this divorce rate. Couples may try to get the pastor to agree with them to get a divorce. The pastor may be asked, "Should we divorce or should we stay together for the kids?"⁵⁸ Pastors must let couples decide the option for divorce themselves. Pastors can still be of tremendous help by presenting marriage counseling as another viable option. God's plan is for marriages to be healed and to be restored.

Unrelenting Problems

Pastors on the "front lines" may sense unrelenting and complicating problems while speaking with the couples. What is a pastor to do when there are clear signs of spousal abuse or clears signs of addictions or patterns of chronic affairs? These are examples of complicating problems that hope can still conquer. These unrelenting problems will now be briefly discussed.

Effective Handling of Domestic Violence

Pastors must be aware and equipped to handle domestic violence cases effectively. Domestic violence is a sad reality that has invaded the church. According to the U.S Office on Violence against woman,

domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This

⁵⁷ Adele M. Banks. "Christians question divorce statistics." Star Tribune, March 17, 2011: Variety Section. F5. (US Census data- 6.8 weddings per 1000 people vs. 3.6 divorces per 1000 people)

⁵⁸ Worthington, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy, 246.

includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.⁵⁹

Pastors must be able to recognize the circular patterns associated with domestic violence.

Three general steps according to Clinton and Hawkins are as follows: 1) tension builds and the abuser loses control, 2) battering occurs and 3) remorse.⁶⁰ The batterer may sometimes feel the victim deserves it and rationalize the abuse. In the remorse stage, the batterer may seem truly repentant, but this is usually due to the reduced tension and the feeling that the victim “has learned her [or his] lesson.”⁶¹

Since domestic violence is more about power and control, pastors can use the following information wheels⁶² to gain a broader perspective.

⁵⁹ <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>

⁶⁰ Timothy E. Clinton and Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling: Personal and Emotional Issues* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009), 95-96.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶² Domestic Violence Council, *Domestic Violence Resource Guide for Faith Leaders* (Maricopa Association of Government, 2001), 53-57.

Power and Control

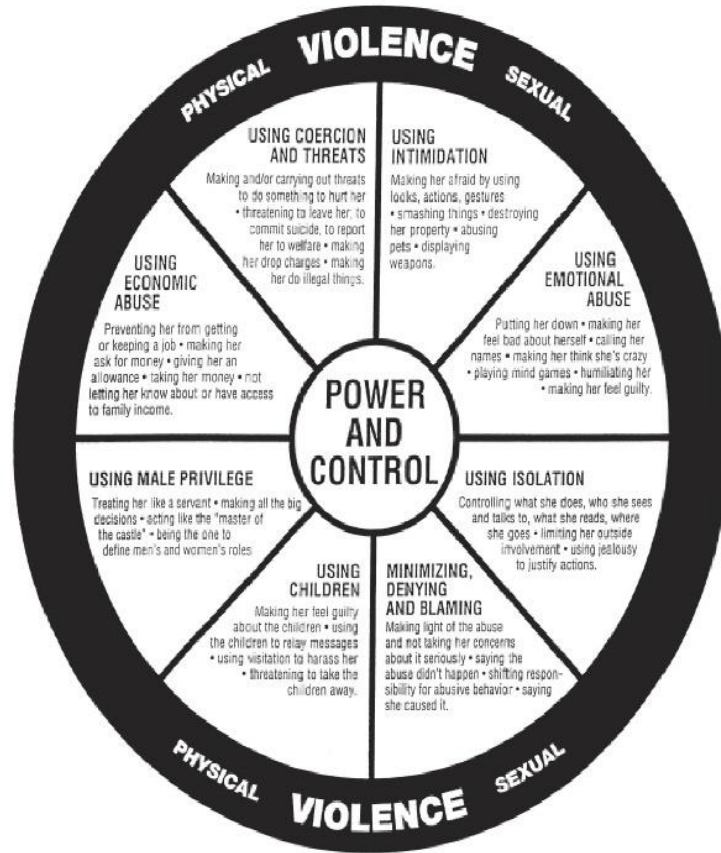


Figure 2

Abuse of Children

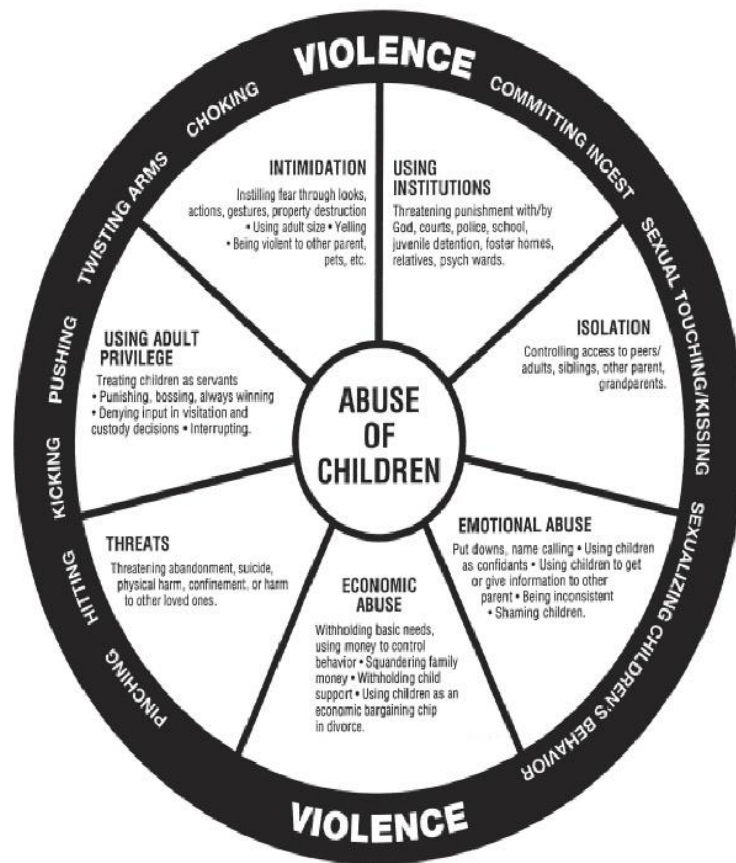


Figure 3.

Pastors can ask the following questions to gain more information about the abuse.

- “What’s it like for you at home?”
- “What happens when you and your partner disagree?”
- “Do you have to account for your time?”
- “Are you ever afraid of your partner?”
- “Does your partner push you around or hit you?”⁶³

⁶³ Ibid., 13.

Safety must be the number one concern for the victim. Proverbs 22:3 states, “A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge.” Pastors must help victim make a plan should the abuse occur again. The safety plan should include the appropriate emergency numbers to call- police, a family shelter, a trusted friend and the place they may go. Victim should also have a photo copy of important documents packed in a bag with essentials. If the victim must leave after the next abusive episode, he or she should do so calmly and go to the predetermined location.⁶⁴

Pastors must help victim understand that they are not responsible for the abuse. There is no excuse for abuse and therefore the pastor must encourage the victim to allow the abuser to experience the consequences for his or her behavior. Proverbs 19:19 states, “a hot-tempered man must pay the penalty, if you rescue him you will have to do it again.”

The pastor may also have the opportunity to meet with the abuser, if a member of the church. The pastor must be clear that abuse is sin that needs to stop. Eph 4:26 states, “Be angry and sin not.” The abuser must take responsibility and stop blaming the spouse for the abuse. The abuser must understand that there are consequences which includes “legal intervention, church discipline and separation.”⁶⁵

Pastors should also let the abuser “Get honest with God,” as conviction will allow the abuser to see the need for change. Pastors must also warn that “a man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy” (Prov 29:1).

⁶⁴ Clinton and Hawkins, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling: Personal and Emotional Issues*, 98.

⁶⁵ Light University, *Marriage Works: Enriching Your Marriage and Encouraging Others*, 221.

The pastor must also sense if there is true Godly sorrow. 2 Cor 7:10 states, “Godly sorrow brings repentance....and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

Pastors can guide the abuser through the SEVEN DIPS OF HEALING based on the story in 2 Kings 5 of Naaman’s healing as follows:

1. Needs new skills in problem solving. (he [she] has used power and control as the way to solve problems).
2. He [she] needs to learn how to take orders rather than give them. Giving up control, putting himself [herself] under authority- the church, the counselor, the law.
3. He [she] needs to learn how to appropriately express his [her] feelings without abuse, intimidating or manipulation.
4. He [she] needs to learn to allow his [her] wife [husband] to be separate and disagree and differ with him [her] without feeling terrified of abandonment.
5. He [she] needs to learn how to speak directly about what he [she] needs and to trust others are there to be there and care.
6. He [she] needs to learn how to handle the hurt and disappointment that inherently comes when people who care let us down.
7. He [she] needs to take the initiative and responsibility to meet his [her] own needs rather than demanding that his [her] wife [husband] always do so.⁶⁶

It is God’s will to restore the abuser if he or she is truly repentant and sees the need for change through conviction.

Recovery from Addictions and Substance Abuse

Addictions and substance abuse can cause distress in a marriage. Pastors can help couples to recover by first understanding the two perspectives of addiction. The first perspective is where addiction means “to become physiologically or psychologically dependent on a habit-forming substance.” For example, a spouse could be addicted to drugs, pornography, gambling, alcohol). The second perspective is where addiction means “to occupy (oneself) with or involve (oneself) in something habitually or

⁶⁶ Ibid., 223-225.

compulsively.” For example, a spouse could be addicted to work, shopping, social media or the gym. Addictions can further complicate marriages that are in distress.

The Bible teaches, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). Ephesians 5:18 says, “Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit.” The contrast in this verse is powerful. Pastors must be able to convey to the counselee that if he or she wants to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, he or she cannot be controlled by wine. Whatever someone depends on, controls them.

Alcohol accounted for 31% of all fatal accidents in US in 2014.⁶⁷ Research has shown that more than 8 million children live with parents who are substance abusers. Substance abuse exists in 40 to 80 percent of families in which the children are victims of abuse.⁶⁸ Alcohol can increase the chance of physical and emotions abuse in the marriage.

The statistics on pornography is also alarming. In this year, 2017, a quarter of a billion people are expected to be accessing mobile adult content from their phones or tablets, an increase of more than 30% from 2013.⁶⁹ In the church, 51% of pastors say internet pornography is a possible temptation. 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women say they watch porn at least once a month.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ National Highway and Traffic Safety, “Traffic Safety Facts - Alcohol-Impaired Driving,” 2014, <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812231> (Assessed April 3, 2017).

⁶⁸ National Counsel on Child Abuse & Family Violence, “Parental Substance Abuse a Major Factor in Child Abuse and Neglect,” 2015, <http://www.nccafv.org/parentalsubstanceabuse.htm> (Assessed April 3, 2017).

⁶⁹ Covenant Eyes: Internet Accountability and Filtering, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/> (Assessed April 3, 2017).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Once the pastor senses an addiction, it is important for the pastor to understand that a key characteristic of addiction is denial.⁷¹ Pastors can gain valuable insight based on how the counselee answers the following questions:

1. Has anyone ever suggested that your use of _____ is a problem? If so, why do you think the person said that?
2. Have you ever been concerned about your use of _____? If so, why? How about when _____ happened? You don't think that _____ is a problem? You wouldn't consider it a problem if you saw it in your best friend or spouse?
3. How often do you use this substance and how much at each use? So in an average week you are using at least _____ times and doing so to get high every time?
4. Do you ever hide your use from family members or friends? You mean if they were sitting here with us now, they would agree to knowing all about the number of times you used each week?
5. At what age did you first use _____? Do you remember when you began using every week/weekend/day?
6. Have you ever done anything while under the influence of _____ that you later regretted? Have you ever had a conviction or ticket for driving under the influence? Have you ever been arrested for assault or domestic abuse? Have the police ever shown up at your house to deal with your _____-related behavior even if it didn't result in arrest?
7. Did anyone in your family of origin use a substance in excess while you were growing up? What did this person do? Did he [she] ever get free of it? Do you remember how you felt when you saw this person using _____?
8. Has your use of _____ ever affected your job or your family? What happened? Are you under any current threats from your boss or spouse that, if you use again, there will be some action on his or her part against you?
9. Have you ever quit or tried to quit using? How long were your sober? What happened when you quit? How did you feel? How did your spouse/children/boss respond to you when you were sober? What would it take now to accomplish that again?
10. Do you want to quit for good? If "for good" seems too impossible to comprehend, how long are you willing to stay sober if you tried it again? Who could best help you stay sober if you gave it a try? What will/should happen if you relapse again?
11. How do you see your life improving if you can quit using _____? How will things improve with your spouse/children/boss if you quit and clean up?

⁷¹ Timothy F. Clinton and John Trent, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage and Family Counseling* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, ©2009), 15.

12. Is your faith or is God a resource to turn to for strength in this struggle? How has God helped you get and stay sober in the past?⁷²

Addictions can add complications to a marriage already in distress but a desire to change can be a new beginning towards healing for the couple.

Survival from Chronic Affairs and Adultery

Affairs and adultery can complicate the marriage and further the distress.

Adultery happens when one person has a sexual relationship with someone other than their spouse. Adultery can also be an emotional affair which can be even more devastating on the marriage.⁷³ Emotionally affair occurs when a husband or wife looks to someone of the opposite sex outside the marriage for support. Most affairs begin as friendships. Studies show that 45-55% of married women and 50-60% of married men engage in adultery at one time or another during their relationship.⁷⁴ These numbers are alarming and pastors should understand the different patterns of infidelity and the process of recovery as shown in the table below.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid., 16-17.

⁷³ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁴ Joan D. Atwood and Limor Schwartz, "Cybersex: The New Affair Treatment Considerations," *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy* 1, no. 3(2002): 37-56.

⁷⁵ Light University, *Marriage Works: Enriching Your Marriage and Encouraging Others*, 231.

CHARACTERISTICS	CLASS I	CLASS II	CLASS III
Biblical Illustrations	David & Bathsheba	Samson & Delilah	Eli's Sons
Description	A one- Night Stand	A Long Term Relationship	Multiple Partners
Development	Immediate	Gradual	Impulsive
Emotional Involvement	None	Intense	None
Sexual Activity	Single Experience; Intense, Lustful, Passionate	Only Much Later in Relationship—After Friendship Established	Immediate and Repeated with Multiple Partners and Increasing Distorted Sexual Activity
Remorse/ Repentance	Usually Immediate and Intense	Initially None; Only Grief for Lost Relationship	Only After Acting-Out Episode; Internal Tension Until Another Episode is Inevitable
Recovery	Can be Immediate with Forgiveness	Long-Term Process with Marital Therapy	Sobriety First; Then Individual Therapy; Marital Therapy Later

Table 2. Different Patterns of Infidelity.

Questioning the unfaithful spouse can help gauge the level of emotional involvement and the strategy needed for repentance, forgiveness and possibly

reconciliation. If the unfaithful spouse would like to work towards reconciliation, then the pastor can explore the reasons that perpetuate the affair. The pastor can also ask the following questions:

Are you aware of what needs you were seeking to have met from this relationship?

What do you see are the effects on your spouse of your having an affair? How do you feel about what has happened to him [her]?

Is any part of you happy or justified that your spouse was hurt?

Are you willing to take full responsibility for your actions without placing any blame on your spouse?

Are you willing now to be accountable for your time and relationships on a daily basis?

Are you willing to pursue professional counseling?⁷⁶

The pastor must allow the faithful spouse to grieve out the hurt. According to Clinton and Trent, the following five stages of grieving can be experienced at any time, in rapid succession or repeated at any time.⁷⁷

Shock and Denial: The “No, not me” stage is when the hurting spouse is unwilling to accept the reality of the spouse’s affair.

Anger: The “Why me?” stage is when the spouse is aware of hurt and feels anger against the unfaithful spouse.

Bargaining: The “If I do this, you’ll do that” stage is when the faithful spouse bargains to avoid more pain.

Depression: The “It really happened” stage is when the wounded spouse realizes the impact of the infidelity on the marriage and mourn the loss of what the relationship once was.

⁷⁶ Clinton and Trent *The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage and Family Counseling*, 37.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

Acceptance: The “This is what happened” stage is when the faithful spouse has come to terms the infidelity and is willing to move forward.

It is in the acceptance stage that the decision for reconciliation can be fully realized by the faithful spouse. The unfaithful spouse must recognize the minimum time taken to recover can be as long as the affair lasted.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Ibid., 234.

CHAPTER IV COUNSELING STAGES AND STRATEGIES

Pastors can be tremendous help to couples who are in distressed marriages. Helping these couples can be seen as a part of the pastoral counseling aspect of ministry. Since pastors are involved in so many other duties in ministry, pastoral counseling is a “time-limited relationship.” This program will be sharing principles from Benner’s “Strategic Pastoral Counseling Model,”⁷⁹ and Hawkins’ “Pastoral Assessment Model and Counseling Scenario.”⁸⁰

The counseling session will be limited to five sessions with a maximum time of 45-60 minutes. The time limit guidelines can help guard against “clinging”⁸¹ clients. The focus will be on only one problem at a time. If another problem needs to be addressed, another counseling session appointment will have to be made. Each session will have a clear focus, and each session build on the previous ones in contributing to accomplish the overall goal. The sessions will be spiritually focused. The concept of spirituality is grounded in the existence of God as Spirit and his loving act of having created us in his image for intimate relationship with him.⁸²

⁷⁹ Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*.

⁸⁰ Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Pastoral Counseling Scenario: Parts 1-4*, 2008. Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University.

⁸¹ Clyde M. Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960 (1979)), 35.

⁸² Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 63.

The strategy that will be used throughout the sessions are “Faith working through love from conviction.” The following assumptions can guide each session as the pastor looks for areas to build faith, to build the desire for the couple to work, to help build the couple’s love for God and each other, and to help increase conviction.

Annotated Assumptions

- God is already active in the counselee.⁸³ The pastor must actively be looking for clues of this activity.
- The counselee is not the problem, the problem is.⁸⁴ The pastor should be focusing of resolving the problem at hand.
- Counselees have resources and strengths to resolve complaints.⁸⁵ The pastor should be looking for available resources and strengths in the counselee’s life to help resolve problem.
- The pastor’s job is to identify and amplify change. A small change is all that is necessary because a change in one part of the system can affect change in another.⁸⁶
- Counselee’s strengths will be amplified by helping them live around their strengths instead of just forbidding them to do bad things.⁸⁷

⁸³ Kollar, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track*, 69.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Pastoral Counseling Scenario: Parts 1-4*, Power Point Presentation, Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 3

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁷ George Faller, “Positive Psychology: A Paradigm Shift,” *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 36, no. 1(March, 2001), 19.

ENCOUNTER STAGE

The encounter stage includes the initial contact with the couple. Pastors must show empathy, respect, and authenticity in this stage. According to Benner, empathy is a posture of openness to the experience of another person, respect involves valuing the person as made in the image of God, and authenticity is a state of being real.⁸⁸ These three characteristics will help in building the counseling relationship.

It is advisable for pastors to have an intake package which should include a list of ethical guidelines. A sample is below:

Ethical Guidelines

- Pastor will not counsel with opposite sex (outside of own family) behind closed doors (Romans 13:14).
- Pastor will not share privileged information [unless there is impending harm to the care-seeker or someone else] (Proverbs 25:2).
- Pastor will not intentionally lead the care-seeker to believe anything that is not altogether the truth (2 Corinthians 4:2).
- Pastor will ensure that the person being counseled understands that there may be limitations to the counseling relationship which may mean that the pastor may have to speak with others in regards to specific activities such as suspected criminal activity or death threats.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 75.

⁸⁹ Kollar, *Solution Focused Pastoral Counseling an Effective Short Term Approach for Getting People Back On Track*, 99.

- Pastor will continually counsel the law of forgiveness as Jesus Christ spoke about in Matthew 18:22.
- Pastor will ensure that if any given situation comes up that the pastor is not able to properly deal with, the pastor will quickly seek additional help or refer the person to someone with more experience in the matter.⁹⁰
- The Care-seeker will not be neglected or ignored. Prompt response will be given in a reasonable amount of time to inquiries or requests for help.

Worthington also suggest that the intake package should include the following questions below so that the pastor can gain valuable insights about the marriage.

1. Have you ever been to counseling as a result of problems with this relationship prior to today? (Circle: Yes or No) If so, what was the outcome of that counseling?
2. Have either you or your partner been in individual counseling before? (Circle: Yes or No) If so, give a brief summary.
3. Do either you or your partner drink alcohol to intoxication or take drugs to intoxication? (Circle: Yes or No) If yes for either, who, how often and what drugs (or alcohol)?
4. Have either you or your partner struck, physically restrained, used violence against or injured the other person within the last three years? (Circle: Yes or No) If yes for either, who, how often and what happened?
5. Have either of you threatened to separate or divorce as a result of the current marital problems? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, who?
6. Have either you or your partner consulted a lawyer about divorce? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, who?
7. Do you perceive that either you or your partner has withdrawn from the marriage? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, which of you has withdrawn?
8. How frequently have you had sexual relations during the last month? ____times

⁹⁰ Ibid., 96.

9. How enjoyable is your sexual relationship? (Circle one)

Terrible More unpleasant than pleasant Not pleasant not unpleasant More pleasant than unpleasant Great

10. How satisfied are you with the frequency of your sexual relations? (Circle one)

Way too often to suit me A bit too often to suit me About right A bit too seldom to suit me Way too seldom to suit me

11. What is your current level of stress? (Circle one)

Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low Very low
Extremely low

12. To what degree do you have family or friends that support you as a couple?

(Circle one) Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low
Very low Extremely low

13. To what degree do the two of you share a similar basic worldview?

(Circle one) Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low
Very low Extremely low⁹¹

The first session is more of an assessment session. The pastor must gather as much information as possible through actively listening and the information from the intake forms. Pastor should allow both partners to speak from their perspective of the problem description while trying to prevent the couple from interrupting each other.

In the first session, the pastor must assess the nine enrichment areas to determine where the issues lie. The pastor should allow the couple to agree on one the nine areas that need intervention. That area will be explored and addressed in the engagement stage. Sometimes a spouse may find it difficult to narrow down one area or believe five sessions would not be enough. The pastor can reassure spouse by saying,

You might be right, [name]. You may need more help than I can give you. But we won't know that until we use the full five sessions. However, on the other hand, you may be quite surprised by how much help you can get once we are able to focus on one particular aspect of your life. I know it seems that are all equally important, but perhaps you should take some time to reflect prayerfully on them.

⁹¹ Worthington, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy, 88.

You don't need to decide today. We can end now and finish this first session next week at the same time, if that would give you a chance to think about what is most important for you right now.⁹²

It is also in this stage that the pastor will start to help the couple see the need for conviction. Conviction by the Holy Spirit will drive the couple to want to work on their marriage. The pastor can ask the following questions: Do you want God's blessings on your marriage? Is it your desire to be Christ-like? Are you willing to be honest with God (Get Honest with God exercise) as He helps you through this difficult time?

The first session can also be used to observe the couples' communication patterns and conflict resolution skills. Worthington suggest giving the couples five minutes to discuss an issue they usually disagree on. The conversation should be recorded and reviewed later while answering the following questions:

What Couples Say

1. Does each partner seem to understand what the other is saying? If they were asked to repeat the other person's main arguments, do you think each partner could do so with fidelity? (Cue: Understand)
2. Do partners devalue each other? If so, how often and how do they devalue each other? (Cue: How Devalue)
3. To what degree is each person leveling with the partner (that is, sharing important information, feelings, thoughts)? To what degree does each partner seem to be editing information helpfully? (For example, are partners able to control expression of hurtful words and actions?) Unhelpfully? (For example, are partners clamming up or not passing along important information?) (Cue: Level-Edit)
4. Do partners seem bitter and unforgiving? (Cue: Unforgiving)

How Couples Say It

5. To what degree do the couples remain calm, especially when they get involved in a disagreement? (Cue: Calm)
6. Do couples make any attempts to regulate their negative emotion? That is, does one or both partners attempt to lighten the mood when it gets heavy or

⁹² Benner, Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model, 87.

prevent the negative emotion from escalating? Do they have what John Gottman calls self-soothing strategies? (Cue: Regulate)

7. To what degree do partners listen to each other? Is misunderstanding evident? Do they give verbal or nonverbal signals that communicate that they are not listening? (Cue: Listening)

8. To what degree do partners spend time defining the problem versus trying to solve the problem? (Cue: Problem/Solution)

9. How do the partners' problem-solving styles complement or oppose each other? Is one person primarily emotional and the other primarily rational? Can the couple's problem-solving styles work together easily? (Cue: Styles)

10. To what degree is each person able to express his or her emotions nondestructively? (Cue: Emotional Expression)

11. Who does most of the talking? Who commands the floor? Who exerts the most power? Does one person have veto power? (Cue: Talk-Time)

12. Do partners have patterns of communication that make it hard to resolve differences? For example, does one partner (or both) interrupt? Filibuster? Communicate dogmatically? Refuse to consider other points of view? (Cue: Patterns)

13. Do couples devalue each other by looks, gestures, interruptions and other styles of communication? (Cue: Looks)

What Effects Couples Have on Each Other

14. To what degree do partners stake out incompatible positions? Attempt to see behind their positions to the interests of the other person? (Cue: Positions or Interests)

15. To what degree do partners seem committed to winning the argument because their egos are on the line? (Cue: Ego Involvement)

16. To what degree do partners seem to be in a power struggle with each other? Does the argument seem more related to a struggle over who has the say regardless of the problem, or does the struggle seem to be localized to the content of the problem? (Cue: Power Struggle)

17. To what degree do partners devalue each other? (Cue: Degree of Devaluing)⁹³

It is also in the first session that the pastor should make a prognosis. Worthington suggest the prognosis to be based on the following:

The presence of any of these criteria indicate low likelihood of success. Presence of more than one criterion indicates extremely poor likelihood of success:

□ severe psychopathology for either individual

⁹³ Worthington, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy, 88.

- ☐ alcohol or drug abuse for either individual
- ☐ evidence of violence by either or each partner
- ☐ couples using coercion and threats of divorce
- ☐ either partner having consulted a lawyer about divorce
- ☐ either partner habitually withdrawn from the marriage
- ☐ either partner strongly committed ahead of time to a conception of counseling that stresses understanding of motives and insight as the solution for problems rather than active behavior as the solution

Presence of the following factors indicates good likelihood of success. The absence of a factor hurts likelihood of success but does not necessarily indicate a prognosis for failure.

Observable from Couple Interactions

- ☐ less dissatisfaction and distress rather than more
- ☐ ratio of positive to negative interactions that is 5:1 or higher
- ☐ emotional commitment to the specific marriage
- ☐ both partners' perceived-actual emotional intimacy relatively close to ideal
- ☐ both partners' profession that they want to resolve their problems and want practical suggestions
- ☐ couples still emotionally engaged with each other, even if they argue frequently and/or heatedly
- ☐ couples reporting that they are still having relatively frequent sexual relations, especially if those relations are usually enjoyable for both partners

Observable from Characteristics of Couple

- ☐ couple has good reasons for staying together (for example, long history together, children in the home, potential for being hurt in reputation or finances by divorce)
- ☐ younger couples rather than long-married couples ☐ fewer rather than more life stressors
- ☐ presence of a nonintrusive, noncontrolling social support system for both spouses

Partner Similarities

- ☐ both partners express high value of marriage
- ☐ partners agree in general on their worldview, and that worldview is generally consonant with the counselor's worldview
- ☐ couples are both committed Christians
- ☐ couples are not offended by the counselor's Christianity
- ☐ both partners trust counseling and counselor⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Ibid., 93

Pastor should share the prognosis with the couples. However, since “Hope Conquers Distress,” pastors are still encouraged to inject hope. It is in the hopeless situations that God can demonstrate His power.

As time for first session is coming to a close, Narramore suggest the pastor may say, “For the next few minutes let’s discuss...” The pastor may need to interrupt an interview by saying, “Our time has gone by so fast. We’ll have to close now. Shall we continue our discussion next week.”⁹⁵

ENGAGEMENT STAGE

It is in the engagement stage (Sessions 2-4) where most of the counseling will be done. These sessions can be weekly or every two weeks. The pastor will explore feelings, thoughts and behaviors. It is in this stage that the pastor will attempt to build new patterns of acting, thinking and feeling towards each other and towards God.⁹⁶

The pastor should listen empathically to the feelings of each partners. It is advisable not to prejudge feelings but encourage facing and accepting those feelings that are acceptable.⁹⁷

The pastor should give intervention assignments based on targeted area. Assessments should be made throughout the sessions. Kollar’s tracks can be used throughout counseling sessions to amplify change. In the “Recent Change”⁹⁸ track, A

⁹⁵ Clyde M. Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960 (1979)), 34.

⁹⁶ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 40.

⁹⁷ Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 91.

⁹⁸ Kollar, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track*, 1783.

pastor may ask, “What have you noticed that have been better for the past few days?” If something is better, the pastor can clarify the change by asking, “How do you account for this [change]? Are these the types of changes you would like to continue to have happened?”

In the “Future Focus”⁹⁹ track, a pastor may ask, “If right now you had what you want, how would you imagine that your life would be different.” This is similar to the “Miracle Question” discussed earlier.

In the “Managing”¹⁰⁰ track, a pastor may ask, “What are you doing to manage when things are going so bad? What would tell you things are getting a little better?” Any exception to the problem can be the change needed to help the spouse seeking help.

The pastor is encouraged to take notes. This will be helpful when the pastor writes the assessment reports. Worthington suggest one report in session two and one report at session prior to the final session. The first report should include personal data, presenting complaints, relationship history, relationship strengths, relationship weaknesses, recommended treatment goals and overall summation.¹⁰¹ The last report assess the current marital status. The report should describe the progress made, suggest ways for couples to continue working on their goals and the pastors’ feelings about working with the couple in counseling.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid., 1832.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1959.

¹⁰¹ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 94.

¹⁰² Ibid.

DISENGAGEMENT STAGE

The disengagement stage should be session five. The pastor should evaluate the progress. It is recommended to take a break of several weeks before the final session so as to give couples time to apply some of the strategies.¹⁰³ Couples should also use this time to build their faith and love for God and each other.

It is in this stage, referrals can be made if necessary. Referrals can be made for financial, legal, medical or psychological reasons. Referrals can be to physicians (including psychiatrist) and psychologists. The family doctor should be the first point of contact if there are signs of significant weight loss or gain, disruptions in normal sleep pattern, medical symptoms or sexual related issues.¹⁰⁴

Referrals should also be made for psychiatric illnesses such as delusions (false beliefs held despite contrary evidence) or hallucinations (hearing voices when not are present). In cases of serious depression (more than one month and involving considerable alteration of behavior) or displays manic behavior (elevated mood that manifests itself in inappropriate euphoria and exuberance, and inflated sense of well-being, increased motor behavior and energy level that may be exhibited in boisterous and pressured speech, hyperactivity, flight of ideas, or impulsive and irrational behavior). These are some of the main symptoms of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and paranoid disorder.¹⁰⁵

Referrals should be made for drug and alcohol abuse. Referrals can also be made to marital and family therapist. The pastor should check in with couple after referral.

¹⁰³ Kollar, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 97.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

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Appendix C: Referrals

Tondra R. Gregory
Counselor, MEd, LMHC
(646) 494-0201
25 W 45th St
Suite 401
New York, New York 10036

My mission is to empower individuals with the tools and support they need to resolve emotional, behavioral, and relational issues as they seek to improve the quality of their lives and relationships. I have experience working with diverse clients and populations suffering from a number of issues such as depression and low self-esteem, anxiety, anxiety disorders (fears, phobias, panic attacks, and obsessions), general life stress, bereavement, trauma, Post traumatic Stress, relationship/couples conflicts, and marital/familial dysfunction and so much more. My work is characterized by dedication, compassion, and wisdom.

Wanda R Bolden
Counselor, LMHC, MA, NCC
(646) 681-5177
19 W 34th Street
New York, New York 10016

I believe there is hope. I am passionate about creating an environment where healing, self-discovery and restoration can take place. I work with individuals and couples who need a time of care, growth and healing. I am skilled and sensitive in my work with individuals who are struggling with past or recent abuse and or trauma.

KIND Counseling, Inc.
Clinical Social Work/Therapist, LCSW-R
(718) 717-8935
1300 Flatbush Avenue
2nd Floor
Brooklyn, New York 11210

I am a male African-American therapist, who has worked tirelessly to help families from different ethnic backgrounds heal and grow. It is my desire to assist with the improvement of another individual's life in some way, shape or form during the counseling process. I excel in working with teenagers and their families, as well as adults, couples and individuals. I utilize a variety of counseling modalities to engage my clients. These counseling modalities include: family, couples, individual and group counseling.

IJ Nwaogu
PhD
(678) 515-9885
Brooklyn, New York 11207

As a trained counselor & experienced coach, I can help you achieve the results and acquire the tools + answers you need for your long-awaited breakthrough. My goal is to help you become more JOYFUL, AT PEACE & living abundantly. Are you ready to gain the clarity you've been seeking? Let's connect!

Dynesha Henderson
Clinical Social Work/Therapist, LCSW
(847) 448-0512

Are you seeking a better relationship with your partner or child? Are you looking to alleviate some of the stress in your partnership or family? As a trained individual, couples & family therapist, I believe working from a relational approach helps people to gain insight and understanding into the root of the problem. With increased understanding, you have the ability to work on the problems, which can increase confidence, level of happiness, and help you to have more satisfying relationships with those around you.

Simone O Watson
Counselor, LMHC
(347) 507-2815
3020 Glenwood Road
Brooklyn, New York 11210

I have worked in the field of Child and Adolescent Mental Health for over 10 years, and have gained insight to assist youth and their families cope with the impact culture and social environments have on the psychological well being of individuals of all ages.

Cecilia Diana Francis
Clinical Social Work/Therapist, PhD, LCSW-R
(718) 285-7166
570 Westminster Rd
A 20
Brooklyn, New York 11230

I am a licensed bilingual/Spanish speaking therapist, serving a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic population that so much characterizes this segment of Brooklyn. I have had extensive clinical experience as a licensed psychotherapist in New York State: over twenty five years in clinical work, thirteen of which, have been in private practice

Melisa g de la Cruz

Counselor, LMHC, MA

[\(646\) 759-9277](tel:(646)759-9277)

2739 Harway Avenue

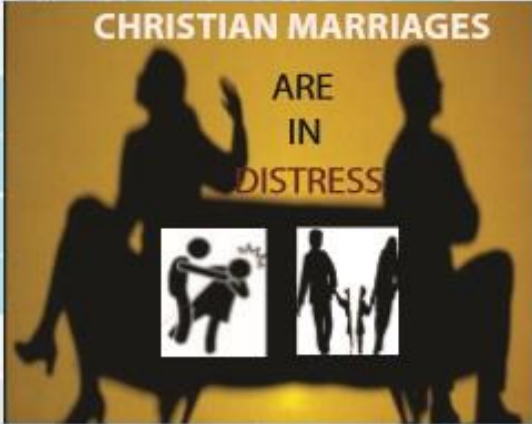
Brooklyn, New York 11214

I'm a licensed mental health counselor with over 5 years experience in the field. I've worked in hospital and school settings and have gained experienced in various issues encountered in life. I enjoy working with children, adolescents, and adults struggling with issues of anxiety, depression, self esteem, trauma, grief, and survivors of abuse.

Marriage Awareness Seminar

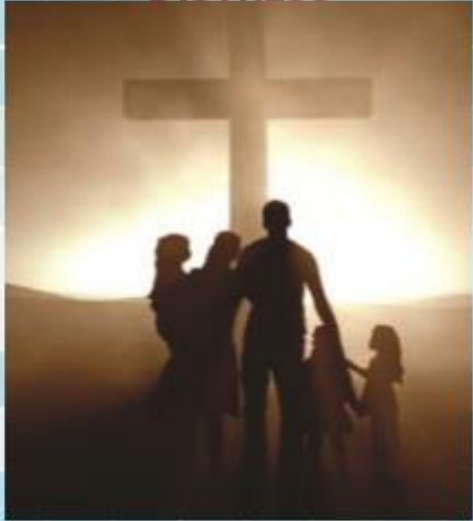
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CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES
ARE
IN
DISTRESS





BUT

**HOPE
CONQUERS
DISTRESS**



Hosted by Pastor Delroy Fredericks

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE
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Special Thanks to Site Team Members
Winnet Fredericks LMSW, Dr. Cheryl Baker
Sr. Pastor Colleen & Elder Charles Kendall
Pastor Norbert Fredericks

Marriage Awareness Flyer

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Sat Apr 1st & 8th 2017 @ 10am - 2pm



Pastor
Delroy Fredericks
DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

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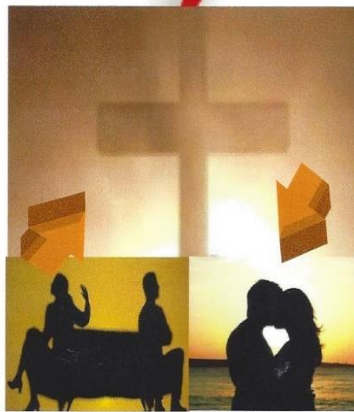
347-731-0729 or scien7@juno.com

Special Thanks to Site Team Members
Winnet Fredericks LMSW, Dr. Cheryl Baker
Sr. Pastor Colleen & Elder Charles Kendall
Pastor Norbert Fredericks

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Appendix E Sample Questionnaires

Pastor's Pre-Training, Awareness, and Informational Questionnaire

Introduction: This questionnaire is designed to test your awareness on state of Christian marriages in the church and to gather information about your confidence and competence levels when dealing with couples in distress.

Procedures: This questionnaire should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. **Please answer the last three questions (q15, q16, q17) after Awareness message.** Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. If you desire to withdraw, please notify the researcher, Pastor Delroy Fredericks, at scien7@juno.com. Thanks in advance for your time and honest responses. Your candid feedback will help us learn valuable information needed for the development of the Marriage Enrichment Training Program to help equip pastors to give hope and restoration to distressed couples.

1. I have read and understood the above instructions and I agree to participate in this study by providing responses to the questions below.

- Yes (1) ☐
- No (2) ☐ – If NO then please skip to end of Questionnaire.

1.a **Name** _____
 Title _____
 Phone _____ **E-mail** _____
 Church/ Ministry affiliation _____
 Address _____

Marital Status: Single (1) ☐ Engaged (2) ☐ Married (3) ☐ Divorce (4) ☐
Age: 18-25 (1) ☐ 26-35 (2) ☐ 36-45 (3) ☐ 46-60 (4) ☐ 61+ (5) ☐
Sex: M (1) ☐ F (2) ☐ **Years Married/Divorced** _____

2. How aware are you about marriages that are in distress in your church?

- Very aware (1) ☐
- Aware (2) ☐
- Somewhat aware (3) ☐ Not aware at all (4) ☐

3. Please respond to this statement: *Pastors, if equipped, can help turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church.*

- Strongly Disagree (1) ☐
- Disagree (2) ☐
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) ☐
- Agree (4) ☐ Strongly Agree (5) ☐

4. The pastoral counseling role in your ministry is viewed as?

- Very Important (1) ☐
- Important (2) ☐
- Somewhat important (3) ☐ Unimportant (4) ☐

5. Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages.

- Extremely effective (1) ☐
- Very effective (2) ☐
- Effective (3) ☐
- Somewhat effective (4) ☐ Not very effective (5) ☐

6. How often do you engage in premarital counseling?

- Never (1) ☐
- Rarely (2) ☐
- Sometimes (3) ☐ Often (4) ☐

7. How often are you involved in marriage encouragement counseling? (Helping a couple with a moderate level of conflict or challenge)

- Never (1) ☐
- Less than Once a Month (2) ☐
- Once a Month (3) ☐
- 2-3 Times a Month (4) ☐ Once a Week (5) ☐

8. How often do you work with a couple in distress? (serious conflict- possibly divorce)

- A few times a year (1) ☐
- About once a Month (2) ☐
- 2-3 times a Month (3) ☐
- One a Week (4) ☐ More than once a Week (5) ☐

9. Please Indicate which of the following statements describe your personal challenges as you work with couples in distress. Check all that apply.

- I sometimes find it hard to combine my Biblical commitment to marriage and compassion for hurting people. (1) ☐
- I am often not sure how to understand the dynamics of how the relationship became a distress marriage (2) ☐
- I sometimes feel uneasy about potential conflicts being both their pastor and counselor. (3) ☐
- I sometimes feel like my own marriage is not a strong example of a healthy relationship. (4) ☐
- I have some uncertainty about how being divorced effects how a person/couple is viewed in my church. (5) ☐
- I find it difficult to remain emotionally neutral when working with a couple in distress. (6) ☐
- I am not always confident I know if divorce is preventable. (7) ☐
- Other (8) ☐ _____

10. Please rate your current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages.

- Extremely confident (1) ☐ Very confident (2) ☐
- Confident (3) ☐
- Somewhat confident (4) ☐ Not at all confident (5) ☐

11. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about your counseling experiences with distressed marriages. (response range is “Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree”)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I feel God uses me to make a real difference with couples in distressed marriages (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I gladly make time when requested (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I would rather refer couples to a marriage counselor than see them myself (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I wish I was better equipped to better help distressed marriages (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I am usually optimistic about the outcome for distressed marriages (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

12. Please rate to what degree the following issues impact your ability as a pastor to work with distressed marriages.

	Makes it extremely difficult (1)	Makes it very difficult (2)	Makes it somewhat difficult (3)	Does not affect my ability at all (4)
Overwhelmed with other pastoral duties (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting discouraged with poor outcomes (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No specialized training for counseling distress marriages (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Couples waiting until it's too late to come in (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not having a clear plan of where to start and where to go with these couples (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Based on your experience with couples in your church, please check the most frequent reasons you hear are the reasons for distress in their marriage.

- How my spouse handles money (1) ☐
- Growing apart (2) ☐
- Not enough attention (3) ☐
- Not being able to talk together (4) ☐
- My spouse's friends (5) ☐
- My spouse's leisure activities (6) ☐
- In-law problems (7) ☐
- My spouse's personal habits (8) ☐
- How we divide household responsibilities (9) ☐
- Religious differences (10) ☐
- Alcohol or drug problems (11) ☐
- Personal problems of my spouse (12) ☐
- Infidelity (13) ☐
- My spouse works too many hours (14) ☐
- Sexual problems (15) ☐
- How we divide child care responsibilities (16) ☐
- Physical violence (17) ☐
- Differences in our tastes and preferences (18) ☐
- Conflicts over raising our stepchildren (19) ☐
- Conflicts over raising our own children (20) ☐
- other: (21) ☐ _____

14. What do YOU believe are the Top 5 reasons for distress in marriages?

1. _____ 4. _____ 2. _____
 _____ 5. _____ 3. _____

STOP. Please respond to next (3) questions after Awareness Seminar Message.

15. Would you be interested in being better equipped to help couples in distress, through a Marriage Enrichment Training Program, that will be designed to help pastors give hope and restoration to distressed couples? **Two (2) Workshops will be in April 2017 (Tentative dates are Sat April 1st and Sat April 8th 2017 @ 10am-2pm).**

Very Interested (1) ☐ Interested (2) ☐ Not interested (3) ☐

16. Do you know of any other pastors who might be interested in this Marriage Enrichment Training Program?

- Yes (1) ☐
- Not sure but I would be willing to ask and find out (2) ☐
- I don't think we have others who would want to be trained (3) ☐
- There does not seem to be a great need for it (4) ☐

17. Would you be interested in reading about the findings and conclusions from this study?

Yes (1) ☐ No (2) ☐

Pastor's Post-Training, Awareness, and Informational Questionnaire

Introduction: This Post-Training questionnaire is designed to measure changes from your initial responses in the Pre-Test Training.

Procedures: Please answer all questions and describe any changes in your response from your pre-training response to each question.

1. I have read and understood the above instructions and I agree to participate in this study by providing responses to the questions below.

- Yes (1) ☐
- No (2) ☐ – If NO then please skip to end of Questionnaire.

1.a **Name** _____
 Title _____
 Phone _____ **E-mail** _____
 Church/ Ministry affiliation _____
 Address _____
 Marital Status: Single (1) ☐ Engaged (2) ☐ Married (3) ☐ Divorce (4) ☐
 Age: 18-25 (1) ☐ 26-35 (2) ☐ 36-45 (3) ☐ 46-60 (4) ☐ 61+ (5) ☐
 Sex: M (1) ☐ F (2) ☐ **Years Married/Divorced** _____

2a. How aware are you about marriages that are in distress in your church?

- Very aware (1) ☐
- Aware (2) ☐
- Somewhat aware (3) ☐ Not aware at all (4) ☐

2b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

3a. Please respond to this statement: *Pastors, if equipped, can help turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church.*

- Strongly Disagree (1) ☐
- Disagree (2) ☐
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) ☐
- Agree (4) ☐ Strongly Agree (5) ☐

3b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

4a. The pastoral counseling role in your ministry is viewed as?

- Very Important (1) ☐
- Important (2) ☐
- Somewhat important (3) ☐ Unimportant (4) ☐

4b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

5a. Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages.

- Extremely effective (1) ☐
- Very effective (2) ☐
- Effective (3) ☐
- Somewhat effective (4) ☐ Not very effective (5) ☐

5b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

6a. How often do you engage in premarital counseling?

- Never (1) ☐
- Rarely (2) ☐
- Sometimes (3) ☐ Often (4) ☐

6b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

7a. How often are you involved in marriage encouragement counseling? (Helping a couple with a moderate level of conflict or challenge)

- Never (1) ☐
- Less than Once a Month (2) ☐
- Once a Month (3) ☐
- 2-3 Times a Month (4) ☐ Once a Week (5) ☐

7b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

8a. How often do you work with a couple in distress? (serious conflict- possibly divorce)

- A few times a year (1) ☐
- About once a Month (2) ☐
- 2-3 times a Month (3) ☐
- One a Week (4) ☐ More than once a Week (5) ☐

8b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

9a. Please Indicate which of the following statements describe your personal challenges as you work with couples in distress. Check all that apply.

- I sometimes find it hard to combine my Biblical commitment to marriage and compassion for hurting people. (1) ☐
- I am often not sure how to understand the dynamics of how the relationship became a distress marriage (2) ☐
- I sometimes feel uneasy about potential conflicts being both their pastor and counselor. (3) ☐
- I sometimes feel like my own marriage is not a strong example of a healthy relationship. (4) ☐
- I have some uncertainty about how being divorced effects how a person/couple is viewed in my church. (5) ☐
- I find it difficult to remain emotionally neutral when working with a couple in distress. (6) ☐
- I am not always confident I know if divorce is preventable. (7) ☐
- Other (8) ☐ _____

9b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

10a. Please rate your current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages.

- Extremely confident (1) ☐ Very confident (2) ☐
- Confident (3) ☐
- Somewhat confident (4) ☐ Not at all confident (5) ☐

10b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

11a. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about your counseling experiences with distressed marriages. (response range is “Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree”)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I feel God uses me to make a real difference with couples in distressed marriages (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I gladly make time when requested (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would rather refer couples to a marriage counselor than see them myself (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wish I was better equipped to better help distressed marriages (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am usually optimistic about the outcome for distressed marriages (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

12a. Please rate to what degree the following issues impact your ability as a pastor to work with distressed marriages.

	Makes it extremely difficult (1)	Makes it very difficult (2)	Makes it somewhat difficult (3)	Does not affect my ability at all (4)
Overwhelmed with other pastoral duties (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting discouraged with poor outcomes (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No specialized training for counseling distress marriages (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Couples waiting until it's too late to come in (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not having a clear plan of where to start and where to go with these couples (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

13a. Based on your experience with couples in your church, please check the most frequent reasons you hear are the reasons for distress in their marriage.

- How my spouse handles money (1) ☐
- Growing apart (2) ☐
- Not enough attention (3) ☐
- Not being able to talk together (4) ☐
- My spouse's friends (5) ☐
- My spouse's leisure activities (6) ☐
- In-law problems (7) ☐
- My spouse's personal habits (8) ☐
- How we divide household responsibilities (9) ☐
- Religious differences (10) ☐
- Alcohol or drug problems (11) ☐
- Personal problems of my spouse (12) ☐
- Infidelity (13) ☐
- My spouse works too many hours (14) ☐
- Sexual problems (15) ☐
- How we divide child care responsibilities (16) ☐
- Physical violence (17) ☐
- Differences in our tastes and preferences (18) ☐
- Conflicts over raising our stepchildren (19) ☐
- Conflicts over raising our own children (20) ☐
- other: (21) ☐ _____

13b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

14a. What do YOU believe are the Top 5 reasons for distress in marriages?

1. _____ 4. _____ 2. _____
 _____ 5. _____ 3. _____

14b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

1 Month Post Training Questionnaire

Introduction: This questionnaire is designed to gather information about your confidence and competence levels when dealing with couples in distress 1 month after participating in the HOPE CONQUERS Marriage Enrichment Training Program. Please RETURN ASAP.

Procedures: This questionnaire should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. If you desire to withdraw, please notify the researcher, Pastor Delroy Fredericks, at scien7@juno.com. Thanks in advance for your time and honest responses. Your candid feedback will help us learn valuable information needed for the improvement of the Marriage Enrichment Training Program to help equip pastors to give hope and restoration to distressed couples.

* Required

1. 1. I have read and understood the above instructions and I agree to participate in this study by providing responses to the questions below. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ yes
☐ no

2. Name, Title, Phone, E-mail, Ministry Affiliation, Address *

3. 2a. How aware are you about marriages that are in distress in your church?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very aware
☐ Aware
☐ Somewhat aware
☐ Not aware at all

4. 2b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

5. 3a. Please respond to this statement: Pastors, if equipped, can help turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

6. 3b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

7. 4a. The pastoral counseling role in your ministry is viewed as?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Unimportant

8. 4b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

9. 5a. Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely effective
- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Not very effective

10. **5b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.**

11. **6a. Please indicate which of the following statements describe your personal challenges as you work with couples in distress. Check all that apply.**

Check all that apply.

- ☐ I sometimes find it hard to combine my Biblical commitment to marriage and compassion for hurting people.
- ☐ I am often not sure how to understand the dynamics of how the relationship became a distress marriage
- ☐ I sometimes feel uneasy about potential conflicts being both their pastor and counselor.
- ☐ I sometimes feel like my own marriage is not a strong example of a healthy relationship.
- ☐ I have some uncertainty about how being divorced affects how a person/couple is viewed in my church.
- ☐ I find it difficult to remain emotionally neutral when working with a couple in distress.
- ☐ I am not always confident I know if divorce is preventable.

12. **6b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.**

13. **7a. Please rate your current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages.**

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely confident
- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ Confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Not at all confident

14. 7b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

15. 8a. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about your counseling experiences with distressed marriages. (response range is "Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree")

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel God uses me to make a real difference with couples in distressed marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I gladly make time when requested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would rather refer couples to a marriage counselor than see them myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I was better equipped to better help distressed marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am usually optimistic about the outcome for distressed marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. 8b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question. Your answer

17. 9a. Please rate to what degree the following issues impact your ability as a pastor to work with distressed marriages.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Makes it extremely difficult	Makes it very difficult	Makes it somewhat difficult	Does not affect my ability at all
Overwhelmed with other pastoral duties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting discouraged with poor outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No specialized training for counseling distress marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Couples waiting until it's too late to come in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not having a clear plan of where to start and where to go with these couples	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. 9b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

19. 10a. How equipped are you now, when dealing with couples whose marriage are in distress, as a result of completing the "Hope Conquers" training workshops?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not equipped	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Well equipped

20. 10b. Please describe the reason for your answer. *

3 Months Post Training Questionnaire

Introduction: This questionnaire is designed to gather information about your confidence and competence levels when dealing with couples in distress 3 months after participating in the HOPE CONQUERS Marriage Enrichment Training Program. Please RETURN ASAP.

Procedures: This questionnaire should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. If you desire to withdraw, please notify the researcher, Pastor Delroy Fredericks, at scien7@juno.com. Thanks in advance for your time and honest responses. Your candid feedback will help us learn valuable information needed for the improvement of the Marriage Enrichment Training Program to help equip pastors to give hope and restoration to distressed couples.

* Required

1. **1. I have read and understood the above instructions and I agree to participate in this study by providing responses to the questions below. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ yes
☐ no

2. **Name, Title, Phone, E-mail, Ministry Affiliation, Address ***

3. **2a. How aware are you about marriages that are in distress in your church?**

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very aware
☐ Aware
☐ Somewhat aware
☐ Not aware at all

4. **2b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.**

5. 3a. Please respond to this statement: Pastors, if equipped, can help turn around the distressing state of marriages in the church.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

6. 3b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

7. 4a. The pastoral counseling role in your ministry is viewed as?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Unimportant

8. 4b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

9. 5a. Please rate your level of effectiveness when working with distressed marriages.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely effective
- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Not very effective

10. 5b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

11. 6a. Please Indicate which of the following statements describe your personal challenges as you work with couples in distress. Check all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ I sometimes find it hard to combine my Biblical commitment to marriage and compassion for hurting people.
- ☐ I am often not sure how to understand the dynamics of how the relationship became a distress marriage
- ☐ I sometimes feel uneasy about potential conflicts being both their pastor and counselor.
- ☐ I sometimes feel like my own marriage is not a strong example of a healthy relationship.
- ☐ I have some uncertainty about how being divorced effects how a person/couple is viewed in my church.
- ☐ I find it difficult to remain emotionally neutral when working with a couple in distress.
- ☐ I am not always confident I know if divorce is preventable.

12. 6b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

13. 7a. Please rate your current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely confident
- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ Confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Not at all confident

14. **7b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.**

15. **8a. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about your counseling experiences with distressed marriages. (response range is "Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree")**

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel God uses me to make a real difference with couples in distressed marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I gladly make time when requested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would rather refer couples to a marriage counselor than see them myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I was better equipped to better help distressed marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am usually optimistic about the outcome for distressed marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. **8b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question. Your answer**

17. 9a. Please rate to what degree the following issues impact your ability as a pastor to work with distressed marriages.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Makes it extremely difficult	Makes it very difficult	Makes it somewhat difficult	Does not affect my ability at all
Overwhelmed with other pastoral duties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting discouraged with poor outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No specialized training for counseling distress marriages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Couples waiting until it's too late to come in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not having a clear plan of where to start and where to go with these couples	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. 9b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

19. 10a. How equipped are you now, when dealing with couples whose marriage are in distress, as a result of completing the "Hope Conquers" training workshops?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not equipped	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Well equipped

20. 10b. Please describe the reason for your answer. *

6 Months Post Training Questionnaire

Introduction: This (LAST) questionnaire is designed to gather information about your confidence and competence levels when dealing with couples in distress 6 months after participating in the HOPE CONQUERS Marriage Enrichment Training Program. Please RETURN ASAP.

Procedures: This questionnaire should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. If you desire to withdraw, please notify the researcher, Pastor Delroy Fredericks, at scien7@juno.com. Thanks in advance for your time and honest responses. Your candid feedback will help us learn valuable information needed for the improvement of the Marriage Enrichment Training Program to help equip pastors to give hope and restoration to distressed couples.

* Required

1. **1. I have read and understood the above instructions and I agree to participate in this study by providing responses to the questions below. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ yes
☐ no

2. **Name, Title, Phone, E-mail, Ministry Affiliation, Address ***

3. **2. Prior to "Hope Conquers" workshops, what type of counseling were you trained to provide? (Check all that applies)**

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Biblical Counseling
☐ Marriage Counseling
☐ Financial Counseling
☐ Pre-marital Counseling
☐ None
☐ Other: _____

4. 3. When do you think a referral should be made?*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ If I am not trained in a specific problem area (after 2 sessions)
- ☐ After I have attempted to help but no progress is made (after 3 sessions)
- ☐ After a minimum of 5 sessions
- ☐ No referral should be made
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other: _____

5. 4. Have you ever been trained to used any of the following counseling theories? (check all that applies)*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Acceptance Commitment Theory
- ☐ Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy
- ☐ Collaborative Couples Therapy
- ☐ Conflict Resoluton Therapy
- ☐ Emotionally Focused
- ☐ Attachment Theory
- ☐ Solution-Focused Brief Therapy
- ☐ Other: _____

6. 5a. Please rate your level of effectiveness, 6 months later, when working with distressed marriages.*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Extremely effective
- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Not very effective

7. 5b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

8. 6a. Please rate your current level of confidence when working with distressed marriages.*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Extremely confident
- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ Confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Not at all confident

9. 6b. Please describe any change in your response from your pre-training response to this question.

10. 7a. How equipped are you now, when dealing with couples whose marriage are in distress, as a result of completing the "Hope Conquers" training workshops?*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not equipped	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Well equipped

11. 7b. Please describe the reason for your answer. *

12. 8. Please describe any changes or suggestions you would like to see in the "Hope Conquers" workshops.

Appendix F: T-Test Results

Participants	Eff - Pre	Eff - Post	Diff		
1	4	3	1	Mean difference	0.764705882
2	3	3	0	Stand Dev Difference	1.032558217
3	4	1	3	Standard Error of Difference	0.243376306
4	4	2	2	T alpha half 95% CI	2.1098
5	4	4	0	Lower Confidence Level	0.251230553
6	2	3	-1	Upper Confidence	1.278181212
7	4	3	1		
8	4	2	2		
9	4	3	1		
10	2	2	0		
11	3	4	-1		
12	3	2	1		
13	3	2	1	t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means	
14	2	1	1		
15	3	2	1		
16	2	2	0	Mean	3.222222222 2.388888889
17	2	1	1	Variance	0.888888889 0.839869281
18	5	3	2	Observations	18 18
				Pearson Correlation	0.370659437
				Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
				df	17
				t Stat	3.389171947
				P(T<=t) one-tail	0.001744286
				t Critical one-tail	1.739606726
				P(T<=t) two-tail	0.003488571
				t Critical two-tail	2.109815578

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Participants	Eff-Pre	Eff-1 Mth	Diff
1	4	4	0
2	3	3	0
3	4	2	2
4	4	5	-1
5	4	3	1
6	2	2	0
7	4	2	2
8	4	3	1
9	4	3	1
10	2	2	0
11	3	4	-1
12	3	1	2
13	3	2	1
14	2	3	-1
15	3	2	1
16	2	2	0
17	2	2	0
18	5	3	2

Mean difference	0.470588235
Stand Dev Difference	1.007326105
Standard Error of Difference	0.23742904
T alph half 95% CI	2.1098
Lower Confidence Level	-0.03033955
Upper Confidence	0.971516024

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	<i>Eff-Pre</i>	<i>Eff-1 Mth</i>
Mean	3.222222222	2.666666667
Variance	0.888888889	0.941176471
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.40730914	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	2.262848189	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.018513545	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.03702709	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

Participants	Conf- Pre	Conf-1 Mth	Diff		
1	4	4	0	Mean difference	1.058823529
2	3	1	2	Stand Dev Difference	0.96634545
3	4	3	1	Standard Error of Difference	0.227769807
4	4	4	0	T alpha half 95% CI	2.1098
5	4	2	2	Lower Confidence Level	0.578274791
6	4	2	2	Upper Confidence	1.539372268
7	3	2	1		
8	3	2	1		
9	3	3	0		
10	3	2	1		
11	3	3	0		
12	4	1	3		
13	4	2	2	t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means	
14	3	3	0		
15	4	2	2		
16	2	2	0	Mean	3.388888889 2.333333333
17	3	2	1	Variance	0.369281046 0.705882353
18	3	2	1	Observations	18 18
				Pearson Correlation	0.192023843
				Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
				df	17
				t Stat	4.776413549
				P(T<=t) one-tail	8.76947E-05
				t Critical one-tail	1.739606726
				P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000175389
				t Critical two-tail	2.109815578

Participants	Eff- Pre	Eff 3 Mth	Diff		
1	4	3	1	Mean difference	0.647058824
2	3	2	1	Stand Dev Difference	1.221739358
3	4	2	2	Standard Error of Difference	0.287966728
4	4	4	0	T alpha half 95% CI	2.1098
5	4	1	3	Lower Confidence Level	0.03950662
6	2	2	0	Upper Confidence	1.254611027
7	4	2	2		
8	4	3	1		
9	4	3	1		
10	2	2	0		
11	3	4	-1		
12	3	2	1		
13	3	2	1	t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means	
14	2	3	-1		
15	3	2	1		
16	2	1	1	Mean	3.222222222
17	2	4	-2	Variance	0.888888889
18	5	3	2	Observations	18
				Pearson Correlation	0.135113205
				Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
				df	17
				t Stat	2.496418259
				P(T<=t) one-tail	0.011558307
				t Critical one-tail	1.739606726
				P(T<=t) two-tail	0.023116614
				t Critical two-tail	2.109815578

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Appendix G: Sample Intake Package
INTAKE PACKAGE
Introduction and Assumptions

My name is Delroy Fredericks and I am currently a Pastor at Jesus Deliverance Mission International Brooklyn (JDMIBrooklyn). Area of specialty as guided by the Holy Spirit is Pre-Marital and Marital Enrichment/ Coaching/ Counseling. Assumptions to guide my counseling sessions are as follows.

- God is already active in the counselee.²⁰¹ I will be looking for clues of this activity.
- The counselee is not the problem, the problem is.²⁰² I be focusing of resolving the problem at hand.
- Counselees have resources and strengths to resolve complaints.²⁰³ I will be looking for available resources & strengths in the counselee's life to help resolve problem.
- Counselee's strengths will be amplified by helping them live around their strengths instead of just forbidding them to do bad things.²⁰⁴
- My job is to identify and amplify change. A small change is all that is necessary since a change in one part of the system can affect change in another.²⁰⁵

Overview of “Hope Conquers” Marriage Enrichment / Counseling

Counseling pastor must promote love, faith and work to help couple or individual through difficult problems. The strategy used by Worthington is “faith working through love.”²⁰⁶ This strategy is used to promote and inject hope into distressed couples. However, I believe “conviction” is also needed in this strategy and therefore I will be using “faith working through love from conviction.” The key principles that will be used throughout our counseling sessions are, hope, faith, work, love, and conviction.

²⁰¹ *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track*, 69.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ronald E. Hawkins, *The pastoral counseling scenario: Parts 1-4*, Power Point Presentation, Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 3

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁵ George Faller, “Positive Psychology: A Paradigm Shift,” *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 36, no. 1(March, 2001), 19.

²⁰⁶ Everett L. Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, ©2005), 32

Hope and Faith

Biblical hope is rooted and grounded in your faith in God. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1, KJV). Biblical hope is “confidence expectation” in what God has promised.

Hope = Conviction + **Willpower** + Waypower + **Wait power even if change to change to change is not happening**

The idea conveyed is that couples must be willing (**Love**) to make their marriage better plus couples must have access to the ways in which to make the marriage better (**Work**) plus the faith in God to wait on their marriage to improve (**Faith**) while actively working to improve it. Wait power is the willingness to press on even though you don't see change. Adding (**Conviction**) at the beginning of this equation can intensify the willingness to change, the desire to work, and increase the couple's faith to wait on God.

Love

True love seeks the highest good for others. Couples must choose to love if they desire change in their marriage. Love is a willingness to value the other person and an unwillingness to devalue the other person.²⁰⁷ Couples must also consciously choose to value their spouse even when they do not feel like it and consciously choose not to devalue their spouse even when they feel the urge to do so.

Work

James rightfully said, “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20 KJV). Couples must invest time and put in work in the marriage to make their marriage better. Work, in hope focus counseling, is a result of love, faith, and conviction. Weaknesses in love, faith, work, or conviction (or combination of the four) are seen as the general cause of marital problems.

Conviction

Conviction causes us to recognize a behavior that goes against a Biblical teaching, moral standard, or Christ-like characteristic that we have chosen to uphold. True conviction is not a guilty conscience, shame over sinful behaviors, or merely knowledge of right and wrong. For a Christian, true conviction is when we become mindful of how much our sin dishonors God. When David was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he cried out, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:4 KJV). When Joseph was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he said, “How could I do this great evil and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9 KJV). If there is a desire for true lasting change to occur, it must come out of conviction, from deep within the hearts of both the husband and the wife.

Sessions

The counseling session will be limited to five sessions with a maximum time of 45-60 minutes. The focus will be on only one problem at a time. If another problem needs to be addressed, another counseling session appointment will have to be made. Each session will have a clear focus, and each session build on the previous ones in contributing to accomplish the overall goal. The sessions will be spiritually focused.

²⁰⁷ *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, 33.

Referral Process

If significant problems remain, the last session will be used to make referrals. Referrals may be to another pastor, small groups or in some cases, other licensed physicians. You will be advised at that time.

Ethical Guidelines

1. I will not share privileged information [unless there is impending harm to the care-seeker or someone else] (Proverbs 25:2).
2. I will not intentionally lead the care-seeker to believe anything that is not altogether the truth (2 Corinthians 4:2).
3. I will ensure that the person being counseled understands that there may be limitations to the counseling relationship which may mean that I will have to speak with others in regards to specific activities such as suspected criminal activity or death threats.²⁰⁸
4. I will continually counsel the law of forgiveness as Jesus Christ spoke about in Matthew 18:22. As I forgive those around me, I hope to be an example to those who are facing similar issues in life.
5. I will ensure that if any given situation comes up that I am not able to properly deal with, then I will quickly seek additional help or refer the person to someone with more experience in this matter.²⁰⁹
6. The Care-seeker will not be neglected or ignored. Prompt response will be given in a reasonable amount of time to inquiries or requests for help.
7. I will not counsel with a female (outside of family) behind closed doors (Rom 13:14).

Statement of beliefs

1. I believe that Jesus is the only way to Heaven (John 14:6).
2. I believe the saving gospel is the good news that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. A person should follow the gospel by repentance (death to sin), water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (burial), and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (resurrection). (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 2:4, 37-39; Romans 6:3-4)
3. I believe that all people are sinners by nature and activity (Ps. 51:5) and unable to reconcile themselves to God by any human efforts (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 3:9-18).
4. I believe that all mankind is in need of personal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. If those I counsel do not possess this salvation, a primary objective of my counseling must be the clear, Spirit-led communication of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (Romans 3:23, 6:23; Matthew 28:19-20)
5. I believe each born-again person must make a conscious decision to “walk in the power of the Spirit of God Who birthed him into this “new life” (Gal 5:16, 25).
6. I believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).
7. I believe that a Christian marriage is a relationship between a male and a female (Gen 2:23-24).

²⁰⁸ Charles Kollar, *Solution Focused Pastoral Counseling an Effective Short Term Approach for Getting People Back On Track* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 99.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 96.

8. I believe that marriage is a covenant, and not just a contract. Marriage vows must be taken seriously in accordance to Numbers 30:2, "If a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath of binding obligation on himself, he must not break his word, but must do whatever he has promised."

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Marital Status: _____ Yrs.

Married/Separated/Divorced: _____

of Children _____ Ages _____

Street

Address: _____

—

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone

(h) _____ (Cell) _____

PLEASE CIRCLE ONE:

Do you understand that the counseling ministry is primarily for JDMIBrooklyn members and non-member fees will apply (Individual: \$75 or Couple: \$100 per session. First session is FREE. Please discuss any financial difficulties)? Y N

Would you say that Jesus is the Lord of your life on a daily basis?
That is, He is the boss, and you are the servant? (Titus 2:14) Y N

Do you believe the Bible is the rulebook for the life of the Christian?
(Matthew 4:4) Y N

Do you understand that it is the believer's responsibility to be "filled (taken over) with the Spirit?" (Ephesians 5:18) Y N

What is the best time of day to contact you? _____

Are there any special considerations?

Please provide a short description of how and when you received Christ as Lord and Savior.

Please provide a short description of the problem. (Please used separate sheet if necessary)

1. Have you ever been to counseling as a result of problems with this relationship prior to today? (Circle: Yes or No) If so, what was the outcome of that counseling? _____

2. Have either you or your partner been in individual counseling before? (Circle: Yes or No) If so, give a brief summary. _____

3. Do either you or your partner drink alcohol to intoxication or take drugs to intoxication? (Circle: Yes or No) If yes for either, who, how often and what drugs (or alcohol)? _____

4. Have either you or your partner struck, physically restrained, used violence against or injured the other person within the last three years? (Circle: Yes or No) If yes for either, who, how often and what happened? _____

5. Have either of you threatened to separate or divorce as a result of the current marital problems? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, who? _____

6. Have either you or your partner consulted a lawyer about divorce? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, who? _____

7. Do you perceive that either you or your partner has withdrawn from the marriage? (Circle one: Yes or No) If yes, which of you has withdrawn? _____

8. How frequently have you had sexual relations during the last month? ____times

9. How enjoyable is your sexual relationship? (Circle one)

Terrible	More unpleasant than pleasant	Not pleasant not unpleasant	More pleasant than unpleasant	Great
----------	----------------------------------	--------------------------------	----------------------------------	-------

10. How satisfied are you with the frequency of your sexual relations? (Circle one)
Way too often A bit About right A bit Way too seldom
to suit me too often too seldom to suit me
to suit me to suit me

11. What is your current level of stress? (Circle one)
Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low Very low Extremely low

12. To what degree do you have family or friends that support you as a couple? (Circle one)
Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low Very low
Extremely low

13. To what degree do the two of you share a similar basic worldview?
(Circle one) Extremely high Very high High Moderate Low Very low
Extremely low²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 88.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Agreement

PLEASE CIRCLE ONE:

I have read the counseling ministry's statement of beliefs.	Y	N
I have read the counseling ministry's ethical guidelines.	Y	N
I understand that the counseling sessions are 45-60 mins in length.	Y	N
I understand that this counseling relationship, dealing with one root issue, will not typically last more than five sessions (no more than one per week).	Y	N
I understand that I am responsible to cancel/postpone within 24 hours of the appointment.	Y	N
I understand that I am responsible to complete any assignments prior to the next appointment.	Y	N
I understand that my counseling pastor is responsible for keeping all information confidential that is not suicidal or homicidal.	Y	N
I understand, however, that if a lifestyle that I am taking part in is harmful to the testimony of Christ through JDMIBrooklyn, that I am expected to repent of these actions and attempt to gain victory over them.	Y	N
I understand that I am expected to refrain from engaging a pastor in a counseling relationship if I am unwilling to repent of my sin.	Y	N
I give my consent for this counseling pastor to share any counseling information with the Senior Pastor for issues of appointment to leadership.	Y	N
I understand no information will be shared with any outside of this counseling relationship. I furthermore understand that state/federal law has certain exceptions to this provision.	Y	N
I understand that I may not agree with the counselor on the inclusion of other parties, and that the counseling relationship may be terminated if the counselor feels that he has exhausted his expertise and training to assist me.	Y	N
I understand that the goal of this counseling ministry is not to create a dependency upon Christian counseling, but to help you grow spiritually and become free through the power of blood of Jesus Christ and to have life more abundantly according to John 10:10.	Y	N

MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH HISTORY / INFORMATION

Are you being treated by a physician for any medical conditions?:

Are you currently taking medication? ☐ No ☐ Yes;

Medication name/dose: _____

Have you ever seen a Psychiatrist or any other mental health provider? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, when? _____ ; Focus of treatment: _____

Helpful? ☐ Yes ☐ No

ALCOHOL / SUBSTANCE USE SURVEY

How often do you have a drink containing alcohol? ☐ Never ☐ 1/month ☐ 2-4/month
☐ 2-4/week ☐ more than 4/week

How many alcohol drinks do you consume on a day you are drinking? ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5-6
☐ 7 or more

Do you use marijuana or other "street drugs"? ☐ No ☐ Yes; what type/quantity/frequency
of use: _____

If you prefer not to answer in writing and choose to discuss this privately, check here ☐

RISK ASSESSMENT

Is there any family history of mental illness or substance abuse? If so, please list
relationship & diagnosis: _____

Have you experienced a personal history of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse?
☐ No ☐ Yes - briefly explain (who, what and when): _____

Has a family member or close friend ever committed suicide?

☐ No ☐ Yes, relationship: _____

Have you been having any thoughts of harming yourself or others?

☐ No ☐ Yes If so, ☐ Self ☐ Other

How or what did you plan to do? _____

What were the circumstances at the time? _____

Counseling Pastor (print) _____ **Sign** _____ **Date** _____

Counselee (print) _____ **Sign** _____ **Date** _____

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